

The emulation of nations :
William Robertson, and the International Order

Geoffrey A. Grundy

Thesis presented for the degree of PhD
at the University of Edinburgh

March, 2005



Declaration

I hereby declare that the following dissertation is my own work of original research conducted in accordance with the rules of Edinburgh University.

Acknowledgments

While it will strike all who find their way to the end that the following thesis has not yet found its definitive form, it is a duty and a pleasure at this point to record the following obligations. First I would like to thank my parents for providing the initial support without which my studies in Edinburgh would not have been possible. Dr. Nicholas Phillipson demonstrated the patience of a thousand Jobs in persevering with his supervision and support of this thesis against all evidence. Elisabeth Maimaris provided much appreciated reassurance and support along the way. Professor Stewart J. Brown, Eric Piper and Fiona Boyle were kind enough to read and comment on individual chapters that were often in a very early state. I would additionally like to thank Dr. Istvan Hont for kindly agreeing to allow me to quote from the manuscript of his unpublished *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective*. Lastly, I would like to thank Neil Hargraves and Alexander Du Toit, the authors of two important theses on Robertson with which it was often my frustrated pleasure to engage.

Abstract

The following thesis is an attempt to explore the historian William Robertson's contribution to the history of political discourse on the international order. It presents Robertson's two great works of international history, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* and *The History of America* as interventions in the debate over Great Britain's global policy in the aftermath of British victory in the Seven Years War. Robertson's *oeuvre* is further explored as a pioneering synthesis of contemporary Scottish theory on the progress of society and the narrative conventions of civil history. It offers a series of contexts in relation to which Robertson's ambitious historiographical project may be situated: the 'reason of state' historiography of the late seventeenth-century and its critics, as well as the international dimension of the historiography of David Hume. The text of *Charles V* employed a narrative of the progress of society in Europe to contextualise the rise of a European states system that structurally precluded the possibility of universal monarchy. *The History of America* situated a narrative of conquest and settlement alongside philosophical digressions on the savage state and the psychology of the conquerors, and in so doing, provided a study of imperial governance as well as a critique of the colonial policy practiced in common by European powers. It is argued that Robertson's work, taken as a whole, constitutes not only a profound meditation on statecraft, but also an innovative attempt to construct a new universal history. The thesis argues that enlightened philosophical history as practiced by Robertson, for all its formal innovation and conceptual sophistication, did not break with the humanistic understanding of history as instruction, as well as entertainment, for the statesmen of the day.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The History of the Balance of Europe	12
Chapter Two: David Hume's History of Europe	68
Chapter Three: Robertson's Scottish Contexts	106
Chapter Four: Charles V and the Origins of the European Balance	135
Chapter Five: The Expansion of Corruption?	223
Conclusion:	341
Bibliography	345

Introduction

On June 10, 1777, the world's most famous living historian received a short, congratulatory note from a friend in Parliament. William Robertson had recently published his third work, *The History of America*, and had sent a complimentary copy to the House of Commons' most celebrated rhetorician, Edmund Burke. Burke had been rather tardy in acknowledgment, but tried to make amends with a variation on the theme of fulsome praise to which the author had long since become accustomed, and no doubt expected. Robertson had yet again rendered an old, tired tale fresh and exciting, but for Burke, Robertson's tale of exploration, conquest, and savage manners was no mere entertainment. 'You have, besides,' Burke extolled, 'thrown quite a new light on the present state of the Spanish provinces, and furnished both materials and hints for a rational theory of what may be expected from them in future.' With the sardonic aside that if more politicians had read such history, the 'present civil war' might have been averted, Burke paused to wonder that France and Spain had yet to throw themselves into the conflict. Following further praise of another aspect of the work, its perceptiveness in relating manners to the progress of society, Burke closed his letter with a valedictory if rather world-weary send off. 'Adieu, Sir, continue to instruct the world; and whilst we carry on a poor unequal conflict with the passions and prejudices of our day, perhaps with no better weapons than other passions and prejudices of our own, convey wisdom at our expense to future generations.'¹

Obvious celebrity value aside, the letter is worth our attention for the light it sheds on how Robertson was read by one of his most enthusiastic and perceptive readers.

¹ quoted in D. Stewart, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. William Robertson,' *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, in *Works*, p. 155.

Above all, Burke was keenly aware just how topical, how precisely *situated* these works were within the political debates and political realities of their day. Robertson, with one eye to theory and another to the coffee house, knew how to select his topics. However brilliantly Robertson may have combined, to the appreciation of commentators from Dugald Stewart onwards, the role of the narrative historian with that of the philosopher, his synthetic approach underscored, rather than diminished, the prescriptive aspect of his works. The point is worth underscoring, as much of the most eye catching of recent work on the history of historiography has sought to underplay the prescriptive or the 'merely political' in favour of emphasising the 'constructed' literary nature of historical texts.² Much of this has been entirely salutary in its effect. Contemporaries highlighted Robertson's 'artful arrangement,' not only of different strands of neo-classical narrative, but also of radically different genres of narrative, as among his greatest achievements.³ This was a formidable literary achievement, but it was above all a humanist achievement with a traditionally humanist prescriptive purpose. Robertson, alone amongst the historians of the Scottish Enlightenment, successfully integrated the new 'science of man' in all its complexity with neo-classical narrative history. In its nuts and bolts, this new Scottish science of man was a re-tooling and development of the conceptual categories of seventeenth century natural jurisprudence for a newly polite and commercial world preoccupied with questions about the nature of improvement.⁴ Robertson deployed the

² The point of departure for all such attempts is H. White, *Metahistory*, (Baltimore, 1973). The most recent, most nuanced, and arguably most persuasive attempt to understand eighteenth-century historiography in such terms is M. S. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of historical writing in Britain 1740-1800* (Princeton, 2000). The phrase 'merely political' is Phillip's.

³ N. K. Hargraves, *The Language of Character and the Nature of events in the Historical Writings of William Robertson*, (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1999), particularly chapters 1 and 5; Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, pp. 89-91.

⁴ The literature detailing this transformation is voluminous, and this listing is by no means exhaustive. But see D. Forbes, 'Scientific' Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar, *Cambridge Journal*, 7

apparatus of natural jurisprudence in his historical writings to elucidate problems that arose from his central theme: the relationship between improvement and war. This was not incidental, as the new questions thrown up by early modern warfare had served as the impetus for the development of modern jurisprudence and had arguably always been that genre's overriding preoccupation.⁵ Robertson was to employ the idiom to answer two parallel questions, how the military capacity among the states of Europe had attained near parity by the sixteenth century, and how at that same period the military capacity of Europeans and American Indians had proved to be tragically unequal.

The trajectory of Robertson's *oeuvre* tellingly flagged his intellectual interests. His *History of Scotland* (1759), a highly accomplished but in many ways apprentice work, situated the arrested development of the rule of law and domestic balance of power between crown and nobility in Scotland within the normative framework of the progress of the rule of law in Europe. His first mature work, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769), told the story of how the modern international state system, - i.e. the adoption of a balance of power between states - came into being through jealous emulation of a would-be hegemon. This work was itself prefaced by a celebrated *View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, a discourse upon how the resolution of an internal balance of power rendered concerted state action possible. *The History of America*

(1953-4), pp. 643-670; idem, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, (Cambridge, 1975); idem, 'Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce, and Liberty' in *Essays on Adam Smith*, (Oxford, 1976) pp. 179-201; K. Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator* (Cambridge, 1981); *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: from Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996); I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds) *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy In the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1981); I. Hont, 'The language of sociability and commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the theoretical foundations of the 'Four- Stages Theory' in Anthony Pagden, (ed) *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987) pp. 253-276; H. Medick, *Naturzustand und naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft: die Ursprünge der bürgerlichen Sozialtheorie als Geschichtsphilosophie und Sozialwissenschaft bei Samuel Pufendorf, John Locke, und Adam Smith* (Göttingen, 1973) and P. Stein, *Legal Evolution: The Story of an Idea* (Cambridge, 1980).

⁵ R. Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order* (Oxford, 1999).

(1777), his flawed masterpiece, thrillingly combined a narrative of brutal conquest with an analysis of savage manners, and told the story of how an empire for expansion slowly and painfully transformed itself into an empire for preservation at peace with its neighbours. Robertson's final work, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning Ancient India* (1791), an appendix to a map and more a pendant to than a summation of a literary career, nevertheless revealed how concerned he was to the end to exert some influence over the manner in which Britain treated the indigenous people over whom she claimed *imperium*. Robertson, for all his considerable innovation, retained a very traditional notion of 'the dignity of history', both in terms of the subject's proper subject matter, and of its importance in public life. Central to the interpretation offered below is that Robertson's choice of subject matter was powerfully informed by the novel nature of the challenges Britain faced in conducting her foreign policy in a period of intense international competition. Robertson worried, no less than his compatriots Hume and Smith, that an antiquated understanding of the operations of the international order had led Britain into a series of costly and unnecessary wars with her rival France. In his two principal works on the international order, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* and *The History of America*, Robertson would provide a philosophical history of the development of the balance of power in Europe and of the flawed commercial empires in the Americas to subvert the assumptions underpinning eighteenth-century conflict. A correct understanding of the balance of power and of commercial empire properly pursued would render conflicts such as the Seven Years War redundant. These were works, to employ the contemporary cliché, as much for instruction as for amusement, aimed as much at instructing statesmen and moving opinion among the

chattering classes as diverting a wider reading public. Robertson yielded to no man in his predilection for the didactic.⁶

While a comprehensive survey of Robertsonian historiography is beyond the scope of the present short introduction, a brief discussion as to why these central aspects of Robertson's *oeuvre* have been relatively neglected requires comment. The most salient factor is that interest in Robertson as an historian has always lagged behind that of his contemporaries Voltaire, Hume and Gibbon. For the better part of the twentieth century, interest in Robertson's works was confined to historians of sociology, who emphasised his contribution to the social theory of the Enlightenment at the expense of the totality of his historical writing.⁷ As historical interest in the Scottish Enlightenment developed later in the century, emphasis was placed on Robertson's role within the history of Moderatism, somewhat to the detriment of his role as an historian.⁸ Furthermore, studies of the political thought of the Scottish Enlightenment have tended to focus on the nature of Scottish endorsement of the Revolution of 1688 and the Union of 1707 as manifestations of 'North-Britishness', and have tended to neglect Scottish thought on the international order.⁹ Colin Kidd's work in particular has greatly enhanced our understanding of Robertson's attitude towards his Scottish past, but this was not a

⁶ Which is to say that, *pace* David Womersley, Robertson's histories were as exemplary as any. They were, perhaps, more exemplary as regard to processes and policy than to individuals, however. For an opposing view, see D. Womersley, 'The Historical Writings of William Robertson' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986) pp. 497-506; Hargraves, *The Language of Character*.

⁷ R. Pascal, 'Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth-Century' *Modern Quarterly*, 2 (1938), pp. 167-179; G. Bryson, *Man and Society: The Scottish Enquiry of the Eighteenth-Century* (Princeton, 1945); E. A. Hoebel, 'William Robertson: An Eighteenth-Century Anthropologist-Historian,' *American Anthropologist*, 62 (1960) pp. 648-655; R. L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, (Cambridge, 1976).

⁸ I. D. L. Clark, 'Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland 1752-1805,' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1963); and classically, R. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment, the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*, (Edinburgh, 1985).

⁹ The state of the art of this approach is C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge, 1993).

theme pertinent to Robertson's later works. This is not to say, of course, that the international dimension of Robertson's thought has been entirely ignored; Karen O'Brien has provided a suggestive reading of his works in the context of eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism, and J. G. A. Pocock has recently offered an equally suggestive reading of his narration of 'the Christian millennium' so illuminating to Edward Gibbon.¹⁰ Nor can it be said that war has been a neglected theme in the historiography of political thought, but such studies have tended to focus on the challenge of standing armies and public credit to republican values.¹¹ The relationship between the themes of war, balance of power and empire has yet to be systematically pursued in Robertson's thought.

Particular explanation should be provided as to why the recent emergence of two highly accomplished doctoral dissertations on Robertson nonetheless leave room for further exploration of his writings. Drawing on the work of Mark Salber Phillips, Neil Hargraves is particularly sensitive to the literary and constructed nature of the historian's work, emphasising their status as narratives and persuasively arguing for the centrality of a language of character in Robertson's writings. Hargraves is thus particularly successful in directing attention to Robertson's exploration of the psychology of his protagonists, especially when dealing with the text of *Charles V*. It may be argued, however, that focusing so squarely on the literary aspect of Robertson's humanist conception of history

¹⁰ Karen O'Brien *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Hume* (Cambridge, 1997); J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Enlightenment: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹¹ On this see particularly, J. Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh, 1985), and I. Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy,' in N. Phillipson and Q. Skinner, (eds.) *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 321-348.

has resulted in a largely internalist reading that leaves undiscussed the historian's equally important prescriptive concerns and the contexts from which they emerged.¹²

Recent work by Alexander Du Toit on Robertson's Presbyterian inheritance and treatment of empire promise to nicely supplement Hargraves' close reading of the texts. Extrapolating from David Allen's insight that enlightened historiography owed much to the heroic example of the sixteenth century-humanists, Du Toit has advanced the thesis that this inheritance informed Robertson's defensive Scottish patriotism and hostility to empire. Unfortunately, while Du Toit brings an impressive erudition to bear on his subject, his approach is not as historically sensitive as one would hope. In maintaining that Scots viewed the world exclusively through the lens of a proud tradition of resisting the English and thus to a man rejected empire and all its works, Du Toit seems to suggest that the Scottish political mind froze in amber around the year 1348. He is on firmer ground when stressing Robertson's Presbyterian antipathy to the Roman church, but, in neglecting the fact that this criticism was strictly political and not theological, Du Toit misrepresents the preoccupations and objectives of the Moderate party. Room remains for a more historically minded contextualist reading of Robertson's history of the international order.

Chapter one will outline the development of the notion of the balance of power in European discourse, with particular attention both to the historical nature of that discourse and to its relationship to humanist historiography. While discussion of the balance of power first came to prominence with Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, it evolved most fruitfully in parallel with the doctrine of state interest as applied to questions of war and peace. A brief treatise by the Duke of Rohan on the interest of the various states of

¹² see note 3 above.

Europe developed into a new genre of historical composition in the hands of the seventeenth-century German jurist Samuel Pufendorf. Particular attention will be paid to the confessional nature of Pufendorf's understanding of state interest and his advocacy of balance of power politics in the defence of the Protestant religion. The efficacy of the balance of power as a means of preserving peace came under renewed scrutiny in the aftermath of the devastation wrecked upon France in the aftermath of the wars of Louis XIV. The chapter will thus move on to consider contributions to the discussion of state interest and the balance of power of two of Louis' most penetrating critics, the Archbishop Fénelon and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Both of these authors advanced the argument to discuss the effects of the balance on commercial prosperity. The chapter concludes with the assimilation of 'interest of states historiography' within the Whig discourse of eighteenth-century Britain in the writings of John Campbell.

Chapters two and three will present two types of Scottish context with which Robertson's texts engaged. The first was the unique challenge posed to Whig Presbyterianism by David Hume's *The History of England*. Chapter two will address an important but comparatively neglected aspect of Hume's text, his narration and assessment of English foreign policy measured against its success in maintaining the European balance. Hume's treatment of European conflict was informed firstly by his sceptical understanding of the interplay of religious passions with notions of interest and secondly by his view of the arrested development of the understanding of commerce on the part of statesmen. His treatment of the pathology of priestcraft and the key role it played in the near dissolution of political society at the end of the sixteenth century was a gauntlet thrown down to any who would defend the benign role of the first estate in

public life. It will be argued, however, that Hume's assimilation of his own insights remained incomplete, and that the great sceptic was never so vulgarly Whiggish as in his narration of the Manichean nature of Anglo-French rivalry.

Chapter three will introduce Robertson's first efforts as a man of letters within their local contexts. It will suggest how in general his understanding of human sociability and the international order were informed by his youthful encounters with stoic philosophy, and how his specific views on church government were formed in the wake of a new wave of evangelisation within the Kirk he viewed as a dangerous enthusiasm. Robertson's only published sermon, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ* will be presented as a response not only to the aftermath of the '45 rebellion but also to the difficulties faced by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in the New World. It will further be suggested that the sermon served as a blueprint for the historical theodicy Robertson developed in all his later writings.

Chapters four and five will take on the two works that together form Robertson's grand narrative of the rise of the modern international order, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, and *The History of America*. Both works will be presented through the lens that they were written in time of war by an historian who understood the dignity of history fulfilled by its humanist function to provide instruction to statesmen. Robertson's decision to follow his *History of Scotland* with an account of the reign of Charles V will be presented as in part a desire to intervene in the controversy surrounding Lord Bute's controversial peace of 1763 that ended Britain's involvement in the Seven Years War. The traditional legitimating discourse for British participation in that conflict was yet again the urgent necessity to maintain the balance of power in the face of French

military and commercial aggression that amounted to a renewed bid for universal monarchy. In addressing himself to the reign of the first modern aspirant to universal monarchy, Charles V, Robertson thus went to the heart of the Whig version of European history and the Whig understanding of Britain's providential role within the European state system. This chapter will take the unusual step of presenting the text of *Charles V* as it was written, two lengthy volumes of intricate narration of war and diplomacy, followed by a weighty historical narrative of how the progress of civilisation by the early sixteenth century had resulted in a balance of military forces. The narrative section of *Charles V* will be presented as preoccupied with contrasting models of statecraft: Charles himself representing the new diplomacy of reason of state, his rival Francis I representing a traditional diplomacy based upon honour. Key to thwarting Charles' ambitions was the capacity of rival statesmen, such as Maurice of Saxony, to jealously emulate his methods to achieve their own ends. Normally seen as an introduction, the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* will instead be presented as Robertson's *ad hoc* attempt to integrate his narrative of personal jealousy and emulation with a more philosophical account of how that effective emulation was practicable. An important lesson *Charles V* offered to its various audiences was that lasting conquest or the establishment of universal monarchy was no longer structurally possible in a Europe of balanced capacities.

Chapter five will focus on Robertson's most ambitious narrative, *The History of America*. It will be argued that as the American history was originally conceived as forming a part of his *Charles V*, its themes were similarly shaped by Britain's involvement in the Seven Years War and its aftermath. Most pertinent to Robertson's discussion was how commercial empire had become entangled with what Hume

described as jealousy of trade. The chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the history of Scottish imperial aspirations, centring on the thought of William Paterson. The chapter will go on to present Raynal's *History of the Two Indies* as a provocative but highly suggestive account of how empire could be conceived and narrated in its totality. Robertson's own history will be presented in turn as meditation on the possibilities of prudent statecraft in a novel and bewildering context, and of the failure of the Spanish to deal prudently with a people they did not understand. Robertson was to make clear that the result of this tragic incomprehension was war, genocide and exploitation. The celebrated Book IV will be presented not as a generic exercise in the natural history of man, but as a focused response to the problem that the nature of the savage posed both for Spanish history and for his own narrative. Robertson's narration of the conquests of Mexico and Peru will be presented as variations on this disturbing theme, with particular emphasis on how a superstitious lust for gold had led to utter corruption of morals. The chapter will conclude with Robertson's discussion of the principles of Spanish colonisation, and with the historian's recommendations for how European empire might still fulfil its providential purpose.

The conclusion will present a speculative sketch of Robertson's macronarrative of the progress of civilisation extending throughout the world. It will further suggest that this macronarrative contained the seeds of a new model for universal history as the history of contact between peoples. Such a universal history was both providential and discreetly post-millennial in its implications.

Chapter One: The History of the balance of Europe

Part one: The interest of states

The balance of power was a central term of political discourse in the early modern period, yet its history has still to be fully incorporated into the history of political thought. As suggested in the introduction, this lacuna has had the effect of obscuring a major theme of Robertson's historical writings. Standard histories of international relations have identified an Italian versus a German conception of the international order, one 'realist' and deriving from the idiom of reason of state and the other 'Grotian' and deriving from the idiom of *ius gentium*.¹ Modern intellectual history, distinguishing between a language of classical republicanism and a language of natural jurisprudence, has reinforced the metaphor of a set of parallel tunnels.² While the balance of power has been seen to emerge from within the Italian model and to resist incorporation into a rule based approach, the following chapter will seek to complicate this story somewhat. Discourse on the balance of power was occasioned by war, and accordingly this discourse was in practice impossible to disentangle from the evolving web of political, religious, and eventually economic concerns over which those wars were fought.

The concept of the balance of power entered English political discourse with the 1578 translation of Francesco Guicciardini's *History of Italy*. In the interpretation of Felix Gilbert, Guicciardini's historical sense was powerfully informed by the slow realisation of the disastrous consequences of Charles VIII of France's invasion in 1494. The invasion had signified the moment in which Italian history could no longer be written

¹ This literature is too voluminous to cite in full, but perhaps the most influential example has been Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London, 1977).

² The most explicit statement of this is in J. G. A. Pocock, 'Virtue, Rights and Manners: A model for historians of political thought', in idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History, Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), pp 37-50.

in terms of the liberty of cities and the purposeful actions necessary to maintain it. Instead, Italy had become a pawn in the contest between the great northern powers, brought about by the shortsightedness of statesman who could only see through the lens of personal ambition. This underscored that the liberty of the great cities would always depend on the system of alliances between them, and that Italian history could only be written as the history of that alliance system. Written in his twilight years, Guicciardini's *History of Italy* was a tragic tale of a pre-lapsarian state of peace and security repeatedly ruptured and increasingly difficult to recreate.³ What Gilbert did not emphasise was that this peace and security had rested for Guicciardini upon a stable balance of forces between the great cities of Italy, a balance that had been the settled political reality prior to the French invasion. Guicciardini's prudent prince had recognised this state of affairs and had directed his foreign policy towards maintaining the equilibrium. He presented the Neapolitan king Ferdinando as a model prince, attentive to preserving the balance. Ferdinando had recognised that the greatest threat to Italian equilibrium was the commercial strength and military aggression of the Venetian republic, 'which at that Time alarmed all of Italy.' Ferdinando had joined with Milan and Florence into a defensive league designed to check Venetian ambitions.⁴ Paradoxically, Guicciardini held that a state of perpetual fear and anxiety led directly to the maintenance of international peace:

³ Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (London, 1965), pp. 253-255, 285-287.

⁴ 'The chief Design of the contracting Parties was to keep down the Power of the Venetians; who were without question superior to any of the Confederates separately, but not able to cope with them when united. Their Senate seemed to consider themselves, and acted as a Body, that had little or no connection with the other people of Italy, widening every breach, and cherishing and fomenting Discord amongst them, in hopes of attaining, by these Means, the Sovereignty of Italy.' F. Guicciardini, *The History of Italy, from the year 1490, to 1532*, translated by the Chevalier A. P. Goddard (London, 1755), pp. 8-9.

Their Envy and Emulation of each other made them watchful of every Motion, and jealous of every Measure, that they conceived might in any way increase the Power or Credit of their Neighbours. This Precaution, however, did not make the Peace less secure: On the contrary, it created a most ardent Impatience in them all to quench immediately those Sparks which, if neglected, might break out into a general conflagration. Such then was the State of Affairs; these were the Foundations for the Tranquillity of Italy; so connected, and counterpoised, that where was any Appearance of a present Change, but the most discerning Person could not devise, by what Counsels, Accidents, or Powers, such a peace could be disturbed.⁵

If for Guicciardini, the power politics of the sixteenth-century northern powers had unleashed a series of tragically missed opportunities for Italy to secure peace and prosperity, within English 'imperial' discourse, these developments had heralded a new dawn. In the eyes of her contemporaries, Queen Elizabeth, having resolved a generation of bitter religious faction with the Religious Settlement of 1558, had removed the barriers to a more active foreign policy. Geffray Fenton, in the dedication of his translation sought to portray Elizabeth as the guardian of the international order.

I may with good comelinesse resemble the gracious reigne of your Maiestie touching these regions of Christendome, to the happy time and dayes of Ceasar Augustus Emperor of Rome: who, after a long and generall combination and harranging of the whole worlde with blood and warres, did so reforme and reduce the Regions confining his Empire, that with the Sceptre and seale of peace he much more prevayled than ever he could have with the sword: By his clemencie he brought to submission his neighbours that strode out agaynst him, and by his constancie helde them assured being once reconciled: His wisdom seemed an Oracle to Nations about him to dispose of their counsels and swaigh their enterprises: And touching quarrels or controversies of state, eyther for his gratitude and injustice, the only arbitration and resolution was referred to him, or at least for the awe that was had of him, the factions dunst not burst out to further limits then he liked of. Lately, it was an approved Monarchie of God, for that Christ the sonne of God amid such an universal malice of man and mankinde, was contended to shew himself in fleshe in the days of his reign.⁶

Fenton's parallel of Elizabeth and Augustus had millennial significance. According to Orosius, the first Christian writer of universal history who Fenton was invoking, Christ had appeared during the reign of Augustus only after the Emperor had put an end to the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ G. Fenton, 'Epistle Didicatorie' in F. Guicciardini, *The History of Guicciardin, Contending the Warres of Italie and Other Parties, Continued for many years under sundry Kings and Princes, together with the variations and accidents of the same devided into twenty books*, (London, 1579). dedication unpaginated.

Civil Wars and established a newly pacific international order under his protection.⁷ This vision of Millennial monarchy owed a debt to the parallel rhetoric of the imperial apologists of Charles V, yet with a crucial difference.⁸ The apologists of Charles V had presented his reign as fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel through establishing a universal monarchy, while Fenton hinted that Elizabeth would do so through her pacific control of the scales of Europe, as she had placed in her hands 'the balance of power and iustice, to poiye and counterpoyze' the other states of Europe.

The theme of Guicciardini's *History* received far greater prominence through its mention in an essay by Francis Bacon. Bacon was a friend and admirer of the Italian Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, Alberico Gentili, whose juridical works had codified the practices of Italian *ragione di stato* at their most brutal.⁹ In his 'On Empire' Bacon provided his own brief overview of the duties of the sovereign.

First, for their neighbours, there can be no general rule be given (the occasions are so variable), save one which ever holdeth –which is, that princes do keep due sentinel, that none of their neighbours do overgrow so (by increase of territory, by embracing of trade, by approaches, or the like), as they become more able to annoy them than they were; and this is generally the work of standing councils to foresee and to hinder it. During that triumvirate of kings, King Henry VIII. of England, Francis I., king of France, and Charles V., emperor, there was such a watch kept that none of the three could win a palm of ground, but the other two would straightways balance it, either by confederation, or, if need were, by a war, and would not in any wise take up peace at interest; and the like was done by that league (which Guicciardine saith was the security of Italy), made between Ferdinando, king of Naples, Lorenzius Medices, and Ludovicus Sforza, potentates the one of Florence, the other of Milan. Neither is the opinion of some of the schoolmen to be received, that a war cannot justly be made, but upon a precedent injury or provocation; for there is no question but a just fear of an imminent danger, though there be no blow given, is a lawful cause of war.¹⁰

⁷ J. G. A. Pocock *Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 85-86.

⁸ F. Yates, *Astrea. The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1975); J. Robertson 'Empire and Union: two concepts of the early modern international order' in Robertson (ed) *A Union for Empire, Political Thought and the Union of 1707*, p. 11.

⁹ R. Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 16-17.

¹⁰ F. Bacon, 'Of Empire' in *Essays* (London, 1857), pp. 185-186.

For Bacon, the duty to maintain the balance of power was a directive to war. The passage betrays something of the humanist's contempt for traditional scholastic condemnations of the legitimacy of a pre-emptive strike.¹¹ The practical implication, in Bacon's mind, of the sovereign's duty to maintain the European balance was for Elizabeth to wage war on an over-mighty Spain.¹² His discussion was to have a resonance beyond informing his own official counsel; its effect was to link the achievement of early sixteenth-century statecraft with the beginning of the modern age as marked by the appearance of the compass, the needle, and gunpowder.¹³ This juxtaposition was to exert a powerful influence over Robertson's own historical thought.

The moderated form in which the balance of power came into its own within historiography was through the doctrine of state interest. As Albert Hirschman has shown, the concept of 'interest' had emerged in the study of government as a middle way between reasoned conduct in accordance with the common good and erratic action dictated by the selfish passions.¹⁴ As it implied calculation and prudence, advocacy of governance in accordance with state interest served to moderate the more brutal forms of reason of state.¹⁵ The founding work in what developed into the genre of 'interest of states history' was *A Treatise of the Interest of the Princes and States of Christendome* (1638) by the Huguenot statesman and general, the Duke of Rohan, and dedicated to Cardinal Richelieu. (Ironically, Rohan had previously fought in the Huguenot uprising

¹¹ Tuck presents the 'humanists are from Mars, Scholastics are from Venus' argument quite forcefully. *The Rights of War and Peace*, chapters 1 and 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ F. Bacon, *The New Organum*, book I. aphorism no. 129 (Oxford, 1855)

¹⁴ A. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Arguments for Capitalism* (London, 1975) pp. 31-54.

¹⁵ N. O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 153-154.

Richelieu had effectively suppressed.)¹⁶ In his preface, Rohan began with the arresting phrase, 'The *PRINCES* command the People, & the *Interest* commands the Princes.'¹⁷ Hence, the ability of a prince to correctly determine state interest was coterminous with that state's preservation. Rohan held that the interests of certain states were dictated by the logic of expansion, others by the logic of preservation. The changing fortunes of states in pursuance of these goals meant that state interest itself altered with the passage of time. Exploring state interest was thus primarily a task for modern history. Rohan did not offer his assessment of state interest for the benefit of the statesmen or sovereign of the individual state in question, but rather for those with which they engaged. The utility of Rohan's endeavour assumed a sort of rational choice theory; as interest ruled princes, their movements were therefore predictable: to know their interests would be to know their actions.

The salient aspect of the international order as Rohan perceived it was its division into two rival blocs, that of France and that of Habsburg Spain. The desire of Spain was to realise a universal monarchy, the aim of France was to prevent this. The remainder of the states of Europe lined up with the one, or the other, as it suited their interest. Rohan did not employ the term balance of power, yet he did hold that in nearly every case it would interest states to side with France against Spain to prevent universal monarchy.

Rohan noted that Elizabeth had best understood England's interest, and had provided an exemplary model of state interest correctly pursued. First, she had effectively suppressed faction, having realised that 'England is a mighty Animal, which

¹⁶ Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History*, translated by Douglas Scott with an introduction by Werner Stark, New Brunswick, NJ, 1998.

¹⁷ Rohan, *A Treatise of the Interest of the Princes and States of Christendome*, translated by Henry Hunt (London, 1641).

can never dye except it kill itself.’¹⁸ She had then embraced the reformed faith as a method of lessening Spanish influence, having fully understood the benefits of maintaining hostilities with that kingdom. These advantages included having thwarted Spanish ambitions in the Indies, increasing England’s wealth thereby, and in having perpetuated the martial vigour of her subjects. Rohan held that the Elizabethan legacy had set a model to her successor, that ‘he ought thoroughly to acquire the advancement of the Protestant Religion, even with as much zeale as the King of Spaine appears Protectour of the Catholick.’¹⁹ Rohan’s analysis would have been well received by those Englishmen who understood their realm as having a providential role in defending the Protestant religion, and who understood Elizabeth’s Stuart successors to have signally failed in this capacity. They would have been comforted by the fact that their zeal had the backing of cold reason of state. Supporters of both king and Parliament seized upon Henry Hunt’s 1640 translation of Rohan, and as the seventeenth century progressed, the notion of ‘interest’ had come to dominate English political discourse.²⁰

The example of ‘interest of state historiography’ that enjoyed the greatest success both in England, and in Europe generally was Samuel Pufendorf’s *Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms of Europe* (1682). As with Rohan, the study of interest was for Pufendorf reducible to the study of a state’s relationship to the European balance. The timing of the English translation of Pufendorf’s *Introduction*, and the success of its reception, was due in no small part to the timeliness of its theme. The German émigré physician, Jodocus Crull, published his translation in 1698, following the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁰ J. A. W. Gunn, “‘Interest Will Not Lie’: A Seventeenth-Century Political Maxim”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29 (1968), pp. 551-564.

cessation of William III's war against Louis XIV's France waged to preserve the balance and liberties of Europe. A large part of the work's success was due to the international renown its author had earned as a natural law theorist. Installed in university curricula throughout Protestant Europe, Pufendorf's writings, and particularly his doctrine of sociability, were viewed as offering a sound theoretical defence against the perceived atheistic and absolutist theories of Thomas Hobbes. Yet if Pufendorf's translation found itself as a foot soldier in William's wars against Louis, the original work emerged from quite another context. Recent scholarship has portrayed Pufendorf's *oeuvre* as an attempt to develop an ethical and political philosophy required by the newly 'desacralised states' of the new Germany created by the Treaty of Westphalia.²¹ In his juridical works, Pufendorf thus abetted this deconfessionalisation of the state by sharply severing the type of natural jurisprudence he offered from natural theology.²² Yet those very aspects of Pufendorf's work that recommended it to an English audience in time of war, namely its robustly sectarian defence of a European balance to thwart popish universal monarchy, would seem to fit uncomfortably within such an overall project. Furthermore, the imperative to maintain the balance of power was a doctrine of reason of state, as it often recommended pre-emptive war of a type difficult to reconcile with scholastic just war theory.

Yet while the idioms of natural jurisprudence and reason of state might seem antithetical, the one concerned with the codification of ethical norms and the other with the breach of such norms in the name of necessity, the conflict was more apparent than real. Reason of state did not enjoy a greater coherence in German discourse than it had

²¹ I. Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 148; J. Tully, 'Introduction, S. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law* (Cambridge, 1991) pp. xiv–xxi.

²² I. Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments*, pp. 149–151; J. Tully, 'Introduction,' xxi–xxiv.

anywhere else.²³ The idiom had been introduced into Germany early in the seventeenth century, but reached the peak of its influence in the years surrounding the Thirty Years War. In the pioneering writings of Arnold Clapmar, reason of state emerged within the dominant Aristotelian discourse of its day as an attempt to subordinate jurisprudence to politics, and it developed as a method of practical adjudication between the rival schools of the monarchomachs and of the divine right theorists. In its German dialect, reason of state addressed such local issues as the doctrine's applicability to the constitution of the Empire and as an arbiter between contrasting confessional understandings of the common good.²⁴ It is noteworthy that the apparently mutually hostile idioms of natural jurisprudence and reason of state both shared a common feature: the reorientation of political discourse away from the citizen towards the rights and duties of the sovereign. Richard Tuck has gone further, arguing that the Protestant and neo-stoic natural jurisprudence that took its bearings from Hugo Grotius could itself be seen as a movement within reason of state discourse by rendering self preservation a first principle.²⁵ Through collapsing the moral distinction between individuals in the state of nature and states within the international realm, Grotius had provided a doctrine that permitted sovereigns remarkable latitude in their relations with other states. The effect of this, Tuck has argued, was to provide theoretical justification for Dutch imperialism at its most nakedly aggressive²⁶ Even for those theorists who would distance themselves from some of Grotius' more controversial positions, such as a natural right to punish in the

²³ H. Hopfl has argued that 'reason of state,' had no coherence as a body of thought and only ever served as a useful phantom menace for more orthodox opponents. See his 'Orthodoxy and reason of state', *The History of Political Thought*, 23 (2002), pp. 211-237.

²⁴ H. Dreitzel 'Reason of state and the crisis of political aristotelianism: an essay on the development of 17th century political philosophy', *History of European Ideas*, 28 (2002), pp. 3-4

²⁵ R. Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace*, p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-108.

international arena, reason of state was sufficiently unencumbered theoretically, or at least encumbered in a sufficiently diverse manner, to allow itself to be absorbed within a juridical idiom in the assessment of the actions of sovereigns. In Pufendorf's case, the rapprochement hung upon the definition of interest.

Ironically, Pufendorf, unlike Grotius, freely employed the idiom of state interest in assessing the proper conduct of princes while entertaining a more generally pacific understanding of the international order than had the Dutch jurist. Pufendorf, with his avant garde metaphysics of 'moral entities,' extended Grotius' parallel between the state of nature and the international order by describing the individual as a 'simple' and the state as a 'compound' moral entity.²⁷ Yet in his juridical works, Pufendorf argued that if one understood the state of nature as less red in tooth and claw than Grotius or Hobbes had done, one emerged with a different model of the potential for relations between states. Alfred Dalfour has argued that it was no contradiction for Pufendorf to argue that sovereigns had a duty to pursue reason of state, so long as that sovereign understood the public good to be his first duty and that the dictates of reason of state he pursued were conformable to right reason. From such a perspective, the *ius naturale* and the *ius gentium* informed by reason of state were one and the same, as no promise made to a foreigner could possibly trump the duty of a sovereign to his people.²⁸

Pufendorf's reputation as an historian in the latter half of the eighteenth century suffered somewhat on account of the damning criticism of Voltaire. In the preface of the second volume of his *Essai sur les mœurs*, Voltaire contrasted his own brand of polite,

²⁷ Pufendorf described the state as 'a compound moral person, whose will, intertwined and united by the pacts of a number of men, is considered the will of all.' Op. cit. in A. Dufour, 'Pufendorf,' in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 567.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 585-586.

discriminating and philosophical history with the plodding, interminable and 'tedious and incorrect descriptions of battles' that served no purpose other than to 'overload the mind.' Voltaire employed Pufendorf as a straw man of pointless erudition with which his own philosophy would shine in comparison.²⁹ While Voltaire was referring to the jurist's massive volumes written for the Swedish court, he held, as we shall see, the present work in similar contempt. This was somewhat unfair, as Pufendorf ironically understood his own work as a practical counterblast to antiquarian pedantry. Pufendorf's *Introduction* can in fact be seen as a parallel work to his *On the Duty of Man and Citizen* (1673), both in terms of pervasiveness of influence and intended purpose. The former work was an abridgment of his colossal *On the Law of Nature and Nations* (1672), the latter intended as a primer in modern European history for apprentice statesmen. As Pufendorf wrote in a letter to a friend, the former was written for the university, the latter for the court.³⁰ Pufendorf began with the claim that such a history would be 'the most pleasant and useful Study for Persons of Quality, and more particularly for those who design for Employments in the State.'³¹ He felt such a history would address a pressing need, as he was dissatisfied with the teaching of history in the universities of his day, which remained mired in an unjustifiable preoccupation with the literary aspects of ancient

²⁹ 'I remember, that upon looking into Puffendorff, who wrote in Stockholm, and had access to the archives of the state, we thought ourselves sure of finding what forces that kingdom maintained; what number of inhabitants; how far the people of the province of Gothland had joined those who ravaged the Roman empire; in what manner the arts, in process of time, were introduced into Sweden; what were its principal laws, its riches, or rather its poverty: but we did not find a single word'. Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe, from the time of Charlemain to Lewis XIV. With a Preliminary View of the Oriental Empires* (Edinburgh, 1758), p. iv.

³⁰ Pufendorf to Christoph Schomer in a letter from 1690: 'Under the pressure of war I was compelled to change my home and manner of life, being unexpectedly driven from the school to the court, where I had to give up those studies and apply myself to a new kind of activity. But the outline of that doctrine as I then conceived it, has stuck in my mind...' quoted in James Moore and Michael Silverthorn, 'Protestant Theologies, Limited Sovereignties', in J. Robertson (ed) *A Union for Empire*, p. 173.

³¹ S. Pufendorf, *An Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms And States of Europe*, translated by Jodocus Crull (London, 1752), p. a4.

history. 'Now I cannot for my life,' Pufendorf maintained, 'apprehend what great Benefit we can expect to receive from Cornelius Nepos, Curtius, and the first Decad of Livy, as to our Modern Affairs, tho' we had learn'd them by heart, and had, besides this, made a perfect Index of all the Phrases and Sentences that are to be found in them: Or if we were so well vers'd in them, as to be able to give a most exact account, how many Cows and Sheep the Romans led in Triumph when they had conquer'd the Aequi, the Volci, and the Hernici.'³² Future Statesmen did not require from history such antiquarian curiosities or flights of humanist rhetoric; they needed practical vocational training. The structure of the *Introduction* reflected its purpose; it did not attempt to tell the history of Europe in a continuous narrative, but rather accorded each national history its own, self-contained chapter. This fragmentation further reflected the method of the work's composition, each national history cobbled together from its own native historians. Pufendorf stated his intention to assess, without flattery or malice, the relative strength of each state and the nature of its constitution, so as to train young statesmen to be sensitive to such matters.

As a tool for purely *political* instruction, Pufendorf's history was almost entirely geared towards inculcating a correct understanding of State Interest, 'the Principle, from whence must be concluded, whether State Affairs are either well or ill managed.'³³ The essence of statecraft, then, could be collapsed into prudent discernment of real versus imaginary State Interest. 'Real' interest, for Pufendorf, could itself be divided into Perpetual and Temporary. 'Perpetual' interest is informed by 'the Situation and Constitution of the Country, and the natural Inclinations of the People' whereas temporary interest depends on 'the condition, strength, and weakness of the neighbouring

³² *Ibid.*, p. a5.

³³ *Ibid.*

Nations; for as those vary, the Interest must also vary.' Statecraft could then for Pufendorf be reduced to a science of Interest, the principal skills being a sort of national self-awareness and constant observation and study of one's neighbours. It revealed, at one level, a hyper-rationalist understanding of international relations, or rather what international relations should be, one that puts great faith in the 'right-reason' of statesmen in the possession of full knowledge of their own Interest.

But Pufendorf was not so sanguine as to imagine that European history was a consistent narrative of the science of statecraft objectively pursued. Sovereigns were often ill informed, acted out of private interest, or under the influence of favourites or their own blind passions. As a result sovereigns often acted in pursuit not of 'Real,' but of 'Imaginary' interest. Imaginary interest was the delusion of myopic statesmen, insufficiently aware of the sentiments and capabilities of neighbouring states, and was found 'when a Prince judges the Welfare of his State to consist in such things as cannot be performed without disquieting and being injurious to a great many other States, and which these are oblig'd to oppose with all their Power: As for Example, The Monarchy of Europe, or universal Monopoly, this being the Fuel with which the whole World may be put into a flame.'³⁴ Pufendorf's binding together of the spectres of universal monarchy and universal monopoly was ambiguous; the two might be read as the same concept under different descriptions, or he could be read as linking the freedom of the seas with the liberties of Europe.³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pa7.

³⁵ F. Meinecke had argued that Pufendorf's historical writing lacked any general principles. It is curious that Meinecke was unable to recognise the balance of power as such. Cf. L. Krieger 'History and Law in the Seventeenth Century: Pufendorf', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21 (1960) p. 208.

Pufendorf's first chapter, 'Of the Ancient Monarchies' was something of an anomaly within his arrangement, as a deceased sovereignty had no present interest. Yet it was in this section, arguably, that Pufendorf the jurist most transparently informed Pufendorf the historian, both in regard to the origins of government, and in the critique of government offered in terms of its effectiveness in providing security and civil peace. Waxing lyrical about ancient republican liberty was not part of his plan. Pufendorf began with a lengthy section on why individuals join to form civil unions. He maintained that Government, properly speaking, had not existed before the Deluge. All authority had rested with the fathers of families, who had only felt the need to relinquish a part of their authority to wise men in the wake of conflict with neighbouring families. Pufendorf noted how an increase of population had led to increased insecurity, and the need for a common defence, and how such societies had entrusted a severely limited sovereignty to a single chieftain: a process that for Aristotle had initiated a Heroic stage in government. Pufendorf understood this primitive constitution as the origin of the republic, where family heads recognised the need for government, yet felt unable to relinquish a sufficient portion of their liberty to render that government effective.³⁶

While Pufendorf saw ancient democracy as a lesser evil than outright anarchy, he nonetheless understood it as having a role to play in the slow evolution of human society toward ordered government. 'And here is to observ'd', he stated, 'that as all humane Affairs do not come immediately to Perfection, so were the first Institutions of civil-Society very simple and imperfect till by degrees the supreme civil-Power, together with such Laws and Constitutions as were requisite for the maintaining of a civil Society, were

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

instituted.³⁷ Pufendorf understood the constitution of ancient Rome in this light; Roman history was for him rather distasteful and in no sense exemplary. 'And truly *Rome* was nothing else but a Den of Wolves,' he wrote, 'and its Inhabitants, like Wolves, always thirsting after their Neighbour's goods and Blood, living by continual Robberies.'

Pufendorf discerned no meaningful distinction between martial valour and bloodlust, and the latter was a rather poor foundation for stable government. 'It is not always advisable,' he wrote,

to lay the Foundation of a State upon Military Constitutions, since the Changes of War are uncertain, and then it is not for the Quiet of any state that martial Tempers should prevail too much in it. Wherefore Peaceable times did never agree with the *Romans*; and as soon as they were freed from the Danger of Foreign enemies, they sheath'd their Swords in each other's Bowels.³⁸

It would be difficult to conceive of a sentiment less in keeping with republican orthodoxies. Some of Pufendorf's scorn, however, was that of an evangelical Lutheran for a fundamentally Heathen society. Pufendorf had no more love for ancient than he had for modern Roman religion; he was at some pains to collapse the distinction between the fundamentally political nature of both ancient and modern Roman priestcraft. 'What the *Romans* did call Religion', he sneered, 'was chiefly instituted for the benefit of the State, that thereby they might the better be able to rule the Minds of the People, according to the Conveniences and Exigencies of the State.'³⁹ Roman priests, who had been selected from those families that had had an active interest in state affairs, cared little for the actual articles of faith of the vulgar multitudes, who were suitably impressed with the bells and smells offered for their distraction and amusement.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Pufendorf grudgingly conceded the social utility of Roman priestcraft, for a republic was always in particular need of instruments of social control: 'Mankind in general, politically consider'd', Pufendorf maintained, 'is like wild unruly Creatures, ready upon all occasions to shake off the Bridle of civil Obedience, as often as matters do not suit with its humours. Besides, this man cannot be kept in Obedience without the assistance of Men.'⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Pufendorf did acknowledge that Roman liberty had materially contributed to Roman greatness, if only because any future sovereign, solicitous of his own personal security, would have needed to curtail Roman martial spirit and would have grown stronger in the process.

For Machiavelli the strength of the Roman republic lay in the creative tension between patrician and plebeian; Pufendorf turned this notion on its head. He saw the Roman Republic condemned to perpetual instability because it had foolishly institutionalised faction in the form of the Tribunes of the People. 'In this the Nobles did commit a grand Error,' Pufendorf wrote, 'that they allowed to the Common People, which made the major part of the City, a protection independent of the Senate; making thereby the Body of the Commonwealth as it were double-headed.' For Pufendorf a sovereignty divided could never be regular or stable. This unstable division of sovereignty had exacerbated as the Roman Empire expanded; citizens sent abroad to govern newly acquired colonies had become dangerously powerful, and this had been the cause of what Pufendorf described as the return of monarchy, where the Army had exercised sovereign authority. The irregularity of the Roman constitution resultant from imperial overstretch had thus precipitated her decline and fall. Pufendorf's discussion of the ancient world had few lessons for the modern statesman in terms of the balance of

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

power; rather it contained a portrait of a universal monarchy as dangerously unstable as it had been terrible.

Yet this was not to say that the legacy of the Roman *Imperium* had no role in contemporary European affairs, for Pufendorf followed Hobbes in understanding the bishop of Rome as seated upon the throne of the emperors of old. Pufendorf's chapter on the constitution of 'The Spiritual Monarchy of Rome' was most sharply polemical in his *Introduction*, designed to demonstrate point by point that not only had all arguments in favour of the Roman sovereignty been chimerical, but also and more fundamentally had been entirely political in origin. Pufendorf could find no reasonable parallel between the need for a supreme civil sovereignty and the need for a correspondingly supreme ecclesiastical authority:

The Rights of Sovereignty are founded upon evident and undeniable Principles and Divine Institution, since without it, it is impossible that Mankind should live honestly, securely, commodiously and decently. But to find out the same necessity and foundation of the Pope's Sovereign Authority, and to demonstrate that as the Peace and Welfare of Mankind, cannot subsist without a Supreme Civil Power; so the Christian World cannot be without a Supreme Ecclesiastical Power, is in my mind impossible to be done. He that is unwilling to believe this, let him find out a demonstrative proof and he will be the miracle of the World.⁴¹

Pufendorf insisted that it would not be possible to more artfully design a method of producing such a fraudulent sovereignty than that of secret election by that aristocratic cabal, the College of Cardinals. 'By means of this Election,' Pufendorf maintained, 'it is much easier to pick out one that is fitly qualified to represent the great and artificial Hypocrite, and afterwards to make the people believe, that they are ignorant of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

Intrigues of the Conclave, that it was by the particular providence of God Almighty, that such a Person was chosen as the most worthy to be the Vicar of God on Earth'.⁴²

Not only had the papal form of elective monarchy been devised for purely political purposes, but each individual theological tenet of the Roman church, from the typology of sin to the institution of the sacrament of reconciliation, had been artfully devised to maximise the encroachment of the 'papal prerogative' in particular and the interest of the clergy in general.

The distinction betwixt Venial and Mortal Sins, as also what is alleged *de casibus reservatis* is invented for the benefit of the Clergy. That infinite number of Books of confession, enough to freight whole Fleets withal, is not published with an intention to correct Vices, but that by laying Tax upon the same, the Clergy may be better be able to maintain their Grandeur, and falsifie their Avarice. The most comfortable doctrine of remission of Sins, has wholly been accommodated to the Interest of the Clergy. For, because it would not have turned to the profit of the Clergy, if everyone who truly repented should obtain remission of Sins, only by Faith in the Merits of Christ; it has been the doctrine of the Church of Rome, that it was an essential piece of penitence, and the means to obtain forgiveness of Sins, if a most exact and precise account of every individual Sin was given to the Priest.⁴³

The doctrines of justification through good works⁴⁴ and purgatory⁴⁵ had been similarly inspired by clerical avarice and ambition.

Pufendorf found the most scandalous aspect of the papal tyranny to be its monopoly of learning, prosecuted from the insight that opinions formed early in life were the most powerful and lasting. The unfortunate consequence of this was that, for centuries, the greatest scholars of Europe had been no more than 'Popish slaves.'

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁴⁴ 'Why good Works have been made meritorious, and the means of obtaining Salvation from God Almighty, is easily to be guessed. For when they were to give a definition of good works, they were sure to put in the first place, that the People ought to be liberal towards the Clergy, Churches, and Monasteries, and to perform every thing which is commanded them by the Pope and his Adherents, tho' never so full of Superstition and Hypocrisy.' *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁴⁵ 'Purgatory was invented for no other purpose, but that the dying Man, who at that time is not so greedy of worldly goods, which he is to leave to others, might be liberal towards the Clergymen.' *Ibid.*, p. 425.

Pufendorf dubbed Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus 'Patriarchs of Pedantry.' He furthered that 'what they call Philosophy is nothing else but a Collection of foolish Chimeras, empty Terms, and very bad Latin, the knowledge of which is rather hurtful than profitable, if you have not been better instructed otherwise.'⁴⁶

Pufendorf adopted quite another tone as he turned to the subject of Roman efforts to spread the Christian religion beyond Europe, where the higher level of Roman organisation had accomplished a modicum of good. The 'Jesuitical sect,' who had merited scorn in Europe for their attempt to 'insinuate themselves into the very Secrets of the State' to advance the papal interest, outside Europe appeared in a different light altogether.⁴⁷ Pufendorf could not deny that the Roman church and the Jesuits in particular had been vastly more successful than had Protestants in making conversions in the New World, in large part because they had applied themselves to the task with greater vigour. He suspected that their feats of conversion had been in all likelihood exaggerated, but nonetheless viewed them with an uncomfortable admiration.⁴⁸ While Robertson was later to take this gesture of conciliation much further, even in the eyes of a zealous Protestant such as Pufendorf, Popish superstition was clearly preferable to heathen idolatry.

Pufendorf began his survey of contemporary Europe with that state most closely associated with Counter-reformation Catholicism at its most persecuting and inquisitorial, Spain. Pufendorf began with the traditional point that Spain as a modern entity had

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

⁴⁷ 'They have found means, under pretence of being Confessours, to creep into most Courts, and to insinuate themselves into the very Secrets of the State; so that in a great many Courts they have the greatest sway in the Councils; And there you may be sure they will never be forgetful of the Pope's or their own Interest.' *Ibid.*, p. 428.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

commenced with the fifteenth century Union of Crowns, when it had achieved 'that pitch of Greatness, which ever since has made it both the Terroure and the Envy of Europe.'⁴⁹ That terror had been first inspired during the reign of Charles V, a reign that refused to be pigeonholed within Pufendorf's rigid structure; he discussed the whole of Charles' sundry campaigns throughout Europe within his Spanish section, which entailed lengthy digressions into the history of Italy of Germany. In Pufendorf's analysis, Charles' novel ambition had been thwarted by the jealousy of his rivals in three stages; in the first instance by the French king, Francis I, until his defeat at the battle of Pavia. Charles' success at Pavia had, in turn, roused the jealousy of the princes of Italy, whose general confederacy against Charles was pre-empted by the sack of Rome.⁵⁰ Finally, his attempt 'to make himself the absolute master of Germany' had been thwarted by a league of German Protestants. Voltaire later found Pufendorf's handling of the rivalry between Charles and Francis so full of error and fundamentally misguided that, in a fit of pique, the French historian introduced a bit of erudition into his *Essai* to condescend to refute him.⁵¹ Voltaire had little time for the notion that universal monarchy was possible in the modern period and, in order to discount its possibility for Louis XIV, he felt the need to

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ 'The prodigious Success which attended the Emperor, did raise no small Jealousie among the other princes; and by instigation of Pope Clement VII these Armies were raised to maintain the liberty of Italy. To prevent this storm, and especially to withdraw the Pope from the Confederacy, the Emperor's Generals marched directly against Rome...and committed great outrages. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵¹ 'I am far from losing sight of the general view of Europe, to refute the details of a few historians; yet I cannot forbear observing how greatly Puffendorff is mistaken on some occasions. He says, that this expedition against Navarre was undertaken in 1516, immediately after the death of Ferdinand the Catholic, by the dethroned king. To which he adds, that Charles had always his *plus ultra* present and was daily forming vast designs. Here are several mistakes. In 1516 Charles was only fifteen years old; a time of life from which vast designs are hardly expected; and he had not yet taken *Plus ultra* for his motto. In short, it was not John d'Albret that marched into Navarre in 1516, upon the death of Ferdinand; John d'Albert died this very year: but it was Francis I. that made a transient conquest of this Kingdom in the name of Henry d'Albret, not in 1516, but in 1521.' Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe*, pp. 187-188.

chastise Pufendorf for maintaining it had ever been a goal for Charles.⁵² Ironically, far from asserting that Charles had successfully achieved a universal monarchy, Pufendorf held that Charles had prepared the ground for the decline of the Spanish monarchy itself. By Pufendorf's time Spanish history had become a study in decline, and he found that Spanish declension had commenced shortly after the peak of her power under Charles V. As a result of the Emperor's decision to divide his inheritance, the Netherlands had fallen under Spanish control, and Spain's ill judged actions to maintain her sovereignty there had proved her undoing. Pufendorf nonetheless took a balanced view of Philip II; he admired his 'evenness of temper' but felt he had made a fatal mistake in judging that the vast riches acquired in the Americas enabled him to prosecute 'his ambitious designs' with impunity.⁵³ He linked the Spanish failure to hold the Netherlands with the increase of Dutch commerce and military strength that had resulted from her overseas empire building.

Pufendorf found empire to have had the opposite effect on Spanish strength. Pufendorf noted the decisive importance of the conquest of the Americas in shaping Spanish policy, but insisted that 'How easily the Spaniards did conquer these vast Countries, and with what Barbarity they us'd the Inhabitants, is too long to be related here.'⁵⁴ He did pause to scoff at what he found to be the ridiculous papal justification, noting that the 'barbarians' of America had found it as ridiculous as had Protestant Europe. Pufendorf allowed himself the relativist sentiment that the empires of Mexico

⁵² 'The sacking of Rome, and the captivity of the Pope, no more contributed to render Charles V absolute master of Italy, than the taking of Francis I prisoner opened a passage for him into France. Therefore the notion of universal monarchy attributed to Charles V is as false and chimerical as that which was afterwards imputed to Lewis XIV.' Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe*, p. 195.

⁵³ Pufendorf, *Introduction*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

and Peru 'were not so Barbarous as some may imagine, thus having been found among them such excellent Laws and Constitutions as would make some Europeans blush.'⁵⁵

Pufendorf qualified his criticism somewhat by pointing out that claims to sovereignty from conquest typically involve the artful manipulation of history, and that the nature of the conquest was controversial in Spain itself.⁵⁶ Elsewhere in Europe, the verdict had been uniformly hostile, as Pufendorf illustrated with a possibly apocryphal vignette of an exchange between two ambassadors:

Wherefore, when the French and Spanish Ambassadors at Rome, quarrelled about Precedency, and the latter, to represent his Master's greatness, spoke very largely of the vast Riches of America, the Frenchman answered, That all Europe, but especially Spain, had been a considerable loser by them: The Spaniards having employed themselves in searching after the Treasures of America, were thereby become idle, and had dispeopled their own Country. The King of Spain trusting to his great Riches, had begun unnecessary Wars. Spain being the fountain from whence vast Riches were derived to other Nations, did receive the least benefit of all of them, since those Countries that furnished Spain with Soldiers and other Commodities did draw those Riches to themselves.⁵⁷

As a result of Spanish mismanagement, America had not only lacked industry but had also proven a drain on the Spanish economy. For Pufendorf the most salient index of Spanish decline had been her falling population, which had required the use of mercenaries to supplement a dangerously depleted supply of soldiers. The country moreover had been poorly policed, and partly as a cause and partly as a result of this the clergy and nobility had enjoyed excessive influence within the Spanish constitution.⁵⁸

Yet despite the manifest injury Spain had inflicted upon the rest of Europe, her decline remained a cause more for foreboding than for celebration. Spain had long been at the centre of the European state system, and the effects of her forfeit of this position seemed ominous for the European balance. Pufendorf was grimly fatalistic concerning the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-71.

possibility of war following the death of the last Habsburg king of Spain, and felt therefore that it was in the interests of all Europe to prevent her collapse.⁵⁹

Pufendorf thought France likely to become the beneficiary of Spanish decline. France was well situated geographically, 'almost in the very midst of the Christian world; where this King may conveniently keep Correspondence with them all, and prevent *Europe* from falling into the Hands of any one Prince.' A further irony in Voltaire's contempt for Pufendorf's historical analysis was that the German jurist advanced a version of the *thèse royale* that Voltaire was later to extrapolate. Pufendorf located the strength of France not in its relatively anaemic overseas holdings, but in her regular form of government. The French nobility had previously been dangerously formidable, but thanks to the policies of Richelieu and Mazarin, 'they were reduced to such a Condition, that they dare not utter a Word against the King.'⁶⁰ Rival centres of power, such as the Assembly of the Estates and the Parliament of Paris, had formerly been powerful enough to foment discord, but they too had been reduced. 'Heretofore the Parliament of *Paris* us'd to oppose the King's designs, under pretence', Pufendorf noted with scorn, 'that it had a Right, that the King could not do any thing of great Moment without its Consent; but this King hath taught it only to intermeddle with Judicial Business, and some other Concerns, which the King now and then is pleas'd to leave to its Decision.'⁶¹

⁵⁹ 'But if the old Maxims of Policy are not grown quite out of date, it is to be hoped, that all who have any Interest in the preservation of Spain, will with all their Power endeavour to prevent the ruin of Spain, that the Liberty and Possessions of all the States of Europe may not depend on the Pleasure and Will of one single Person. But what Revolution may happen in Spain if the present Royal Family, which has no Heirs get, should fail, is beyond Human Understanding to determine or foresee; because it is to be feared, that upon such an occasion, not only France would do its utmost to obtain it, but also, because several States which were annexed to Spain, by the Royal Family, might take an opportunity to withdraw themselves from the same.' *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Pufendorf rounded off his discussion of France with a lengthy comparison of her military capabilities *vis à vis* her neighbours. She was in a trivial sense neatly balanced against England, the former having the superior infantry, the latter the more formidable navy. However, the English navy was scant threat to French interests, and from Spain and Italy she had equally little cause for apprehension. While the French navy was no match for that of the Dutch, Pufendorf noted that French privateers might well be able to accomplish no small amount of mischief to Dutch sea forces. Only Germany, Pufendorf supposed, posed a potential threat. Even this was highly unlikely, for he found it inconceivable that the various states of the Empire could devise a common interest in any such War. Nor did France truly have much to worry about from a general Confederacy against her, as it would never be in the Interest of Portugal to join with Spain, Sweden with Denmark, or Poland with the House of Austria, in any war against her. For commercial reasons, it was highly unlikely that England and the United Provinces would join together, or that the protestant states of Germany would allow France to fall. France, thus, enjoyed a highly secure position and no doubt promised future aggression, but was certainly in no position to aim at universal monarchy. 'For France' Pufendorf wrote, 'may be the most Potent Kingdom in *Christendom*, but not the only one; and by extending its Conquests too far, it would be weaken'd within: In the mean time, those lesser States bordering upon *France* are in great danger to be devour'd by so flourishing a Kingdom.'⁶²

Pufendorf thought that England enjoyed a position nearly as advantageous as France, secure from invasion and powerful enough to maintain the balance of power throughout in Europe. However, England had not made the progress towards regular

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 236.

government that France enjoyed. He worried that England would always be particularly prone to instability, due to the notoriously factious nature of her citizenry:

But *England* ought to take special Care, that it fall not into civil Dissensions, since it has often felt the Effects of the same, and the Seeds of them are remaining yet in that Nation; which chiefly arises from the Difference in Religion, and the headstrong Temper of this Nation, which makes it very fond of Novelties. Nevertheless a wise and courageous King may easily prevent this Evil, if he does not act against the general Inclination of the People, maintains a good Correspondence with the Parliament; and as soon as any Commotions happen, takes off immediately the Ring-Leaders.

While noting that England and Scotland (he made no distinction between their interests) would only fear competition from maritime powers, he postulated that they did have a crucial role to play on the international stage, being the only kingdom powerful enough to hold the scales of Europe, while remaining sufficiently weak to see her security bolstered by a general equilibrium. 'It is the chief interest of England, to keep up the Balance betwixt France and Spain, and to make a special care, that the King of France do not become Master of the Netherlands; for it is visible, that thereby his power at Sea would be encreased to that degree, that he might enter on a Design of being even with England, for what they have formerly done to France.'⁶³ Pufendorf was concerned that, through the latter half of the seventeenth century, England's foreign policy had gone somewhat astray; engaging in frequent commercial wars with the Dutch was not in her interest.

Nevertheless, how desirous so ever the *English* are to be sole Masters at Sea, it does not seem to be the Interest of *England* frequently to engage in wars with *Holland* it having been observed, that the *Dutch* since the Wars with *England* are rather increased in Valour, Experience, and Power at Sea. And because other Nations are not likely to suffer that *Holland* should be swallowed up by the *English*, or that one Nation should have the Monopoly of *Europe*; it seems therefore the best Method for the *English* to set some others upon their Backs, who may give them so much work, as thereby to give a Check to their growing Greatness; and in the mean while, take care to establish their own Power at Sea, and their Commerce abroad.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

Pufendorf thus held it was in England's interest to allow competition within her waters so as to allay the jealousy of others. The acceptance of this was of cardinal importance to English security, as it was no more in Europe's interest to accept an English universal dominion of the seas than it was to accept the territorial universal monarchy of Spain or France.

Pufendorf was of course most famous for his assessment of the irregularity of the German constitution. The chapter in the *Introduction* containing the history and interest of the German Empire recycled much of the content of his anonymously published *De Statu Imperii*, where he notoriously described that constitution as an 'irregular monster.' In Crulls' translation, the phrase emerged as 'a Body with a great many Heads, without vigour, or any constant Resolution.'⁶⁵ Pufendorf employed a Tacitean understanding of the uniqueness of German liberty against itself; the Saxons had retained a greater sense of their liberty than other tribes, and as a result their Kings lacked true sovereignty, and thus Germany was to remain divided into a multitude of insignificant states. While he predictably sided with secular authority against the papacy in discussing the investiture crisis, he nonetheless found little to recommend in a German statecraft that had dispensed justice with the sword until the reign of Maximilian, who 're-established the Peace of the Empire,' and had prepared the ground for his grandson, Charles V.⁶⁶ The reign of Charles V *had* been a turning point in the history of the German constitution, but primarily as a series of missed opportunities to gain her true station within the European system. Charles had been, in Pufendorf's mind, a fundamentally bad ruler of Germany who had at no point in his reign given serious thought to her interests. It would have been well

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

within Germany's capacity to have held the scales of the European balance herself, but instead her interests at all points came second to those of the Spanish. It surely had not been in Germany's interests to have her coffers ransacked for wars against France. It was always a mistake to elect as Emperor a prince who already possessed a considerable territory.⁶⁷ Pufendorf was baffled at how a prince such as Charles could have failed to take advantage of the opportunity to free himself from the papal tyranny; if he had acted effectively, Germany would have become as safely Protestant as Sweden or England.⁶⁸ For Pufendorf the result of German history had been the dysfunctional nature of the German constitution. 'Its irregular Constitution of Government is one of the chief causes of its Distemper;' Pufendorf wrote, 'it being neither one entire Kingdom, neither properly a Confederacy, but participating in both kinds.'⁶⁹ The sundry princes of the empire could not with reason be considered full subjects of the Emperor, rather as free citizens with the right to dictate matters civil and ecclesiastical. A function of this was that German states often successfully acted according to their independent interest, with 'little account how they Ruin the most powerful.'⁷⁰ Pufendorf believed that as a result of the lack of coordination of German policy, she was likely to fall prey to French designs.

While in the main, the balance of power was either maintained or not according to the prudence of statesmen, Pufendorf provided the beginnings of an explanation of the European balance in terms of more structural forces at work within states. The capacity for state action was first of all dictated by regularity of constitution; France was thus potentially able to dictate the fate of Europe in a way Germany was not. While the reader

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

with a will to do so could tease out from Pufendorf's text a teleology within the history of individual states from irregularity to order, the jurist largely shied away from such attempts at macronarrative. The vision of Europe Pufendorf outlined remained one primarily determined by the interaction occasioned by conflict resultant from either dynastic or from religious motivation. But Pufendorf did not hold that military alliance was the only possible tie between peoples. In the last sentence of his *Introduction* Pufendorf threw out a hint of another potential connection to explain how distant nations not entangled with military alliances might remain peaceable and on good terms. 'The good understanding betwixt Sweden and Portugal,' Pufendorf wrote, 'depends only from the mutual Commerce of these two Nations, who else by reason of this great distance can scarce be serviceable to one another.'⁷¹ That the general interaction between European states might come to be dictated by commercial concerns did not engage Pufendorf, but he had demonstrated the potency of some of the non-commercial barriers such an international order would face.

Pufendorf's *Introduction* was not a work that aspired to be self-consciously literary; the work contained more great set pieces on fisheries than it did on the orations of statesman. The fact that it was so defiantly *not* a literary production, combined with the rather ephemeral nature of the political prescription involved, went some way towards explaining why Pufendorf's general history never found a foothold in the historical canon to the same extent, as did his works on natural jurisprudence. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, one could well have predicted otherwise, however, as Pufendorf's historical work was a runaway best seller and a remarkable chapter in the history of the book. Written in German, the work was soon translated into Latin, French, and English.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

The chapter on the papacy was published on its own in 1690 as *The History of Popedom, Its Rise and Demise*. The same chapter was published independently in the German original, in a critical edition by Christian Thomasius. The whole work, translated into English by Crull, by 1702 had already gone through five editions. Crull, in a companion volume, continued the work up to 1705. An anonymous English author extended the work to include chapters on Africa and Asia. The transformation of Pufendorf's *Introduction* in French translation was perhaps even more remarkable, where a short one-volume introduction to European history morphed into a colossal eight-volume history of the world. Later English editions appeared after 1748 with a newer, more polite translation by Joseph Salter incorporated some of the additions of the work's French editor, Breton de la Martiniere. Pufendorf's *Introduction* was widely reviewed in Dutch periodicals, receiving testimonials from Bayle and Le Clerc, and found itself quickly embedded in university curricula throughout Europe.⁷² It was extolled in lectures by Charles Mackie, first professor of Civil and Universal History at Edinburgh University, where Robertson would have first encountered it. Yet despite its ubiquity during the first half of the eighteenth century, Pufendorf's *Introduction* would eventually be eclipsed by the historical productions of the Enlightenment, a development Voltaire would certainly have understood in terms of the progress of civilisation.

⁷² J. J. V. M. de Vet, 'Some Periodicals of the United Provinces on Pufendorf: reconnecting the reception of his ideas in the 17th and 18th centuries', in F. Palladini (ed) *Samuel Pufendorf und die Europäische Frühaufklärung* (Berlin, 1994), pp. 208-222.

II. Perpetual Peace?

Pufendorf has often been represented as a theorist with a distinctly bleak, Augustinian view of view of human nature, who provided a politics for an irredeemably fallen man.⁷³ The devastation brought to central Europe during his childhood had offered little to counter such a thesis. As such his vision of Europe as a wary, nervously watchful set of armed camps was perhaps all that could be expected. Pufendorf lived long enough to witness the next occasion when Europe was similarly brought to its knees by the wars of the great powers, this time occasioned by the novel success of the French state in overpowering her neighbours. Contemporary observers understood Louis' aspiration through the lens of the collective memory of the reign of the Emperor Charles V, the monarchy of Europe.⁷⁴ Ironically, the military capacity of the French state was the result of policies informed by the very same conception of the balance of power as a reason of state that was traditionally understood to ward off universal monarchy. Louis' chief finance minister, Colbert, had transferred jealousy and emulation from balance of power discourse to the economic sphere, and forged the most progressive and formidable 'fiscal military state' of its day. It was when Hume surveyed the politics of this period that he moved to remark that 'commerce had become a reason of state.'⁷⁵

⁷³ J. Moore and M. Silverthorne place heavy emphasis on this aspect of Pufendorf's theological orientation. Cf. 'Protestant theologies, limited sovereignties', pp. 173-177.

⁷⁴ J. Robertson 'Empire and Union: Two Concepts of the Early Modern Political Order', in Robertson (ed) *A Union for Empire*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ I. Hont, *The Jealousy of Trade, International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, forthcoming).

The fiscal problems of the French state in the aftermath of the wars of Louis XIV produced a state of general disaffection with the conduct of the monarchy, and led to a brief flourishing of projects for reform.⁷⁶ The locus of this reforming effort was the circle of advisers to the son of the *dauphin*, the Duke of Burgundy, led by the Archbishop of Cambrai, Fénelon (François de Salignac de la Mothe). Politically, this circle sought to revive the suppressed constitutionalist tradition within French political thought, collectively producing a *thèse nobiliaire* that emphasised the consultative role that the landed aristocracy had historically played within the French constitution.⁷⁷ The group was thus rather conservative in its political objectives, advocating a root and branch reversal of all the innovations in statecraft and commercial policy implemented by Richelieu and Colbert.⁷⁸ What Fénelon found most damaging in Colbert's policy was the application of a ruthlessly competitive reason of state thinking to commerce, which had opened the Pandora's box of luxury and corruption. In a militarily and commercially overextended France, Fénelon feared he detected the first traces of decline and fall.⁷⁹

Fénelon, in his brief essay *Sentiments on the Balance of Europe*, outlined the foreign policy of the pacific kingship he sought to promote. He began by observing that while states are not tied together by a common rule of law, necessity required they understand each other as forming 'a kind of society and general Commonwealth.' The concerted purpose of this general commonwealth should be to maintain the balance of power for its own safety, as the natural ambitions of princes would, left to their own devices, lead any with the ability to pursue universal monarchy to do so. The need for

⁷⁶ Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen*, (London, 1967); Colin Jones, *The Great Nation*, (London, 2003).

⁷⁷ N. O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 345. I.

⁷⁹ I. Hont, *The Jealousy of Trade*.

such collective responsibility on the part of European monarchs had arisen from the successful dynastic manoeuvres of the house of Habsburg in the early sixteenth century. Fénelon argued that Charles V, after his defeat of Francis I at the battle of Pavia, had come to be rightly dreaded as an aspirant to universal monarchy.⁸⁰ 'What Wars did that produce!' Fénelon exclaimed, 'what Desolation in all *Europe*, until the Peace of *Vermins!*'⁸¹ He argued that even those countries without a direct interest in the behaviour of Spain, *per se*, would have had 'a very good right' to intervene militarily against him. Fénelon was aware that he was advocating a course of action for states that could not be sanctioned among individuals. Yet states in the international arena had no secure rule of law from which to seek protection, and thus were required, for their safety, to assume a more jealous posture.⁸² Fénelon took the parallel between the state and the individual further, arguing that just as individuals have a duty to seek the common good of their own polity, so sovereigns have a duty to seek the common good of the international order. But having made the case for pre-emptive strike as a point of right, Fénelon immediately sought to qualify it, adding that for such actions to be 'lawful, the Danger from it must be real and pressing; the League defensive, or no farther offensive than a just and necessary Defence requires; and such Bounds must be set to it, as it may not entirely destroy that Power which it was form'd only to limit and moderate.'⁸³

In stressing the legitimacy of actions taken to preserve the European balance, Fénelon was issuing a sharp warning to Louis XIV that Europe would be justified in organising to prevent the Spanish succession from ending in France's favour, whatever

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

the legality of the case might have been. Fénelon sought instead to recommend to him a foreign policy directing towards the common good, relating to neighbours as friends and understanding their commerce as reciprocal. France should then emerge all the stronger at home after it had given up the chimerical superiority resulting from conquest. The recent case of Spain had aptly demonstrated that all empire based upon conquest was ephemeral and the aftermath of its necessary collapse was in all cases catastrophic.⁸⁴ For Fénelon a far better form of superiority drew from the inward strengths of a nation:

it consists in a more numerous People, better disciplin'd, and more skilful in Agriculture and other necessary Arts. This kind of Superiority is generally the easiest attain'd, the surest, the least expos'd to the Envy and Combinations of its inferior Neighbours, and more proper than numerous Conquests, and fortify'd Places, to render a People invincible. A State cannot too diligently aspire to this kind of Superiority, nor too carefully avoid the former, which has no other than a false Lustre.⁸⁵

Fénelon's view of pacific foreign policy was rooted in his own Quietist theology. Both the state and the individual should strive after a pure and disinterested cultivation of its inner qualities and love of order. As the individual through an act of *pur amour* would grow to transcend himself, so the state, following a parallel spiritual path could grow to forsake the misguided notions of interest that lead to the desire for conquest and war.⁸⁶

If the writings of Fénelon and his circle were ultimately as reactionary in their aims and proposals as they were progressive in their analysis, that dichotomy did not hold for the work of a reformer of the next generation, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Having been expelled from the *Academie francaise*, Saint-Pierre became the doyen of a rival and more politicised semi-official institution, the Club de l'Entresol.⁸⁷ No less than the circle of

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 25.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁶ N. O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, pp. 342-243; P. Riley, 'Fenelon Philosophe' *The Philosophical Review*, 90 (1981), pp. 285-289.

⁸⁷ N. O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State*, pp. 362-363.

Fénelon, that of Saint-Pierre sought to anatomise the dysfunction of the French monarchy and offer a series of reforms that would put it on a more stable footing. While the writings of Saint-Pierre were too eclectic to fit neatly into any specific tradition, the purposes of his political writings were entirely in keeping with those of the natural jurists, namely the study of the principles upon which the sovereign could achieve steady government.⁸⁸ While he seems to have read and admired the works of the jurists, he found them lacking in method.⁸⁹ For all the startling modernity of his thought, revealed through his emphasis on the importance of public opinion and his thoroughgoing utilitarianism, the Abbé remained a committed advocate of the *thèse royale*; he feared dissolution of government more than he feared tyranny.⁹⁰ The most notorious of Saint-Pierre's many works, the *Projet de traité pour rendre la paix perpétuelle entre les souverains chrétiens*, first published in 1712, formed a part of his broader attempt to reconstitute the French monarchy on a more rational model. The *Projet* sought to address the root cause of the problems of the monarchy, the state of perpetual war in which she found herself, by advocating a revolution in her international relations through entering into confederated union with the European states with which she had fought so

⁸⁸ 'I thought it necessary to begin, by making some Reflections upon the Happiness it would be, as well to the Sovereigns of Europe, as to private Men, to live in Peace, united by some permanent society; and upon the Necessity they are at present in to have continual Wars with each other, about the Possession or Division of some Advantages; and finally upon the Means which they have hitherto used, either to avoid entering upon those Wars, or not to sink under them.' Abbé de Saint-Pierre, *A Project for Settling Peace in Europe: First Proposed by Henry IV of France, and approved of by Queen Elizabeth, and most of the then Princes of Europe, and now discussed at large, and made practicable*. (London, 1714) p. ii;

Cf. Merle Perkins, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre* (London, 1957).

⁸⁹ 'Hugo Grotius, Hollandais, et Samuel Pufendorf, Suédois, Doria, Italien, one discoursu, ils ont traité de la politique, ils ont apporté quelquefois de bonnes raisons pur prouver quelques-unes de leurs propositions: mais, à proprement parler, ils n'ont rien, ou Presque rien démontré.' He held the method of Hobbes in greater esteem: 'Thomas Hobbes, anglais, a plus approché de la bonne méthode de démontrer.' Op. cit. in *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹⁰ T. E. Kaiser, 'The Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Public Opinion, and the Reconstitution of the French Monarchy, *The Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), pp. 623-626.

many expensive and damaging wars. It was a work that at once sought to abolish the *ius gentium* that had served Europe so poorly, as well as a work that took the idiom of *ius naturale* to its logical conclusion. Pufendorfian natural jurisprudence narrated and legitimated the development and formation of civil societies as a response to the disorder of an, admittedly fictitious, state of nature. Natural jurisprudence provided no compelling logical reason why the advantages of political union should cease beyond the level of the state. Intra-state union represented, in a sense, the final frontier of natural jurisprudence

The root of the problem, for Saint-Pierre, lay with existing measures for ensuring peace, treaties, alliances, and above all, the doctrine of the balance of power between the major houses. The history of Europe, which had amounted to little more than perpetual warfare, demonstrated quite plainly that none of these arrangements had worked. Saint-Pierre discerned two underlying reasons why this had been, and without drastic revision of the 'Constitution of Europe,' would likely remain so. The Abbé's first proposition was that as the 'present Constitution' of Europe had been woefully inadequate in providing for European collective security, it was doomed to produce nothing save perpetual War. His understanding of the international order was informed by his strongly Hobbesian conception of the fear of war in the state of nature and that this fear had been preserved intact in the relationship between modern states.⁹¹ The wretched irony of politics was that individuals had contracted together to provide for their security, but the resulting network of rampaging Leviathans had put Europe right back where she had started: in perpetual fear of a war of all against all. The international state system was a fig leaf disguising a state of nature as red in tooth and claw as any state of savagery anywhere:

⁹¹ M. Perkins, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre*, p. 55.

Such is the Condition of the Heads of Families among *Savages*, who live without Law: Such the State of the petty Kings of *Africa*, or the miserable *Caciques*, or petty Sovereigns of *America*: Nay, such is the present Condition of our *European* Sovereigns; as they have as yet no *permanent Society* among them, they have no Law whereby to decide their Differences *without War*: For even tho' by the Conventions of their Treaties, they were able to foresee and decide all the Accidents that might possibly give birth to their Differences; yet, can those Conventions ever be looked upon as inviolable Laws, so long as it remains in the Power of one or other of the Pretenders to violate them, under Pretences which those who are unwilling to submit to them never are without; and will not each of them have the Power to violate them, according to his Caprice, so long as neither the one nor the other is under a necessity of observing them? And what can reduce them to that happy Necessity, but the superior Force of a *society permanent and sufficiently powerful*, if they made a part of it? But as yet they have not form'd a *Society permanent and sufficiently powerful*. Some indeed have form'd Societies by Treaties of Leagues and Alliances; but as those Treaties have nothing in them that's binding, any longer than during the Pleasure of the Allies, they are not *permanent Societies*. Some others have even begun to form *permanent Societies*, such as the thirteen *Switz Cantons*, the seven Sovereignities of the *Netherlands*; but they have not taken Associations enough into their Society, it is not *sufficiently powerful*.⁹²

As such, political society had not served its original mission.

The Abbé's second thesis was that the 'Equilibrium of Power' between the houses of France and Austria had in no way contributed towards European collective security. The precarious equilibrium prevented neither civil nor intra-state conflicts, and had preserved neither territory nor commerce. The Abbé thought this point was self-evident. European statesmen had sought to reduce Europe to a set of scales, and scales were more easily upset than they were balanced:

If Evidence of Argument be not sufficient, let us consult Experience; let us see what has happen'd for these two hundred Years last past in the System of the *Equilibrium*; let us read the History of *Europe*: What has this wretched System produc'd, but almost continual Wars? How short a time did the *Truce of Vervins* last? I cannot call by any other Name a Peace that cannot endure long. On the contrary, how long has the War lasted since that Truce? Such is the Effect of this so desired *Equilibrium*. Now, does not Time past instruct us, that from such Causes, we are, for the future, to expect only such Effects? And who is there that does not perceive, that in the System of the *Equilibrium* there is no Security but Arms in Hand? And thus no body can never enjoy his Liberty, but at the Expence of his Repose⁹³

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p 15.

Perhaps the most fundamental reason why European policy based on equilibrium was unsustainable was its extreme cost; Saint-Pierre argued that without the innumerable military conflicts of the last four hundred years, Europe would now be four times richer than at present.⁹⁴ The interests that had led the major combatants in the war of the Spanish Succession, namely fear of French universal monarchy, and the security of maritime commerce, could only be resolved in a satisfactory way through European Union. Saint-Pierre's inspiration for European Union was the constitution of the German Empire, where fear of the Ban of the Empire had prevented individual German states from engaging in hostilities with each other. The example of the German Empire further demonstrated that Union was not idle Utopia, but practicable policy.

Saint-Pierre's solution was a European Parliament on a republican model with a rotating presidency. The fundamental articles of the European Union were: to make treaties with neighbouring Muslim states, guarantee the existing constitutions of each state, offer special protection of monarchies in time of regency, and affirm their contentment with existing territories. The sovereigns of Europe would additionally resolve to enjoy only one sovereignty at a time, and to refuse forever the Kingdom of Spain to the house of Bourbon. Sovereigns would further enact a free trade zone within Europe, and establish a series of 'Towns Chambers' to adjudicate trade disputes.⁹⁵ Individual EU sovereigns would be disallowed from declaring war on each other, or against a neighbouring state without the express consent of the majority; failure to adhere to this would result in penalties inflicted by the EU as a whole. Such disputes would be heard in the European Senate, comprised of one delegate of the twenty-four member

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

states of 'France, Spain, England, Holland, Savoy, Portugal, Bavaria and associates, Venice, Genoa and associates, Florence and associates, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, the Pope, Moscovy, Austria, Courland and associates, Prussia, Saxony, Palatine and associates, Hanover and associates, Ecclesiastical-Electors and associates.'⁹⁶ All that remained was to convince European monarchs that European Union was in their true interest. While he acknowledged, rather defensively, the starkly utopian nature of his proposal, he was thoroughly convinced that all European heads of state, if they read his pamphlet with sufficient attention, would warm to the plan. It was not that Saint-Pierre lacked a sophisticated understanding of interest; he well understood that ambition was the primary passion of monarchs and that ambition would have to met with a more powerful passion if it's effects were to be neutered. He offered both fear and avarice; universal monarchs would need live in perpetual dread of conspirators, and the wars their universal monarchy would require to maintain itself would sap their states of all their wealth. Without war, commerce could proceed far more productively, thus greatly enhancing the sovereign's revenues.⁹⁷ Without the interruption of commerce necessitated by war, competition for prestige in the arts and sciences would engross the attentions of Europe.⁹⁸ Furthermore, an end to war would encourage the growth of population. 'The more

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁹⁸ 'Every body knows how much Arts and Sciences may help to make a State rich and flourishing; with the Assistance of Art a Man may do as much as twenty others that shall be without Art...Any body may convince themselves of this Truth, by casting their Eyes upon Printing, Graving, and upon Arts more Ancient, upon Mills, Carriages by Water, and on a hundred other Arts; on another side, the Sciences help to improve the Arts, and event he Speculative Arts themselves, by their Lights and Methods, may very much serve to improve Physick, Law, Morality, and especially Polity, upon which depends the Happiness of Sovereigns and their Subjects. [without war...] How much would Pensions and Prizes have excited Emulation among good Genius's. And is it not plain, that the more there are of good wits that apply to a Science, the more their Efforts are stirred up by Emulation, the more the imperceptible Progress they daily make becomes perceptible, even every Year? How many things might be borrowed from Foreign nations, and perfected, were it not for the Interruption of Commerce? These are the true Means of aggrandizing and enriching a State, of giving it Splendor.' *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

Subjects there are, the more Manufacturers they do produce; the better the Lands are cultivated, the more Manufactures they do produce; the better the Lands are cultivated, the more do they bring forth;' Saint-Pierre explained, 'besides, the more People there are employed about Commerce, the more rich does the Country grow, there is no Comparison, therefore, to be made on that side, between the System of War wherein we do live, and the System of Peace wherein we may live.'⁹⁹ Saint-Pierre recognised that this argument would be most persuasive to those states with an unfavourable balance of trade; it would be more difficult, but not impossible, to persuade the monopolists, England and the Netherlands, that European Union was to their favour as well. His argument was that commercial competition was not a zero sum contest, and that the more profitable the commerce of English and Dutch competitors, the more profitable English and Dutch commerce would continue to be; they would not lose their built-in advantages.¹⁰⁰ The ability to undersell was not in itself a legitimate ground for jealousy. The Abbé de Saint-Pierre, in a crowning flush of optimism, had sent his manuscript to Cardinal Fleury, who, upon perusing the manuscript, was reputed to have raised an

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰ 'If by the Treaty of Union (I have been told) Commerce encreases in France, in Spain, in Denmark, in Portugal, and elsewhere, that Increase cannot be made but to the Prejudice of England, and especially of Holland, who now carry on the greatest part of the Commerce of the World: But it is easie to answer this Objection, and to shew that this Argmentation of the Commerce of one, will not at all hinder the Augmentation of the Commerce of the others; the truth is, Commerce will augment among all the Nations; but then it will augment among all proportionably; the Nation which carried on the twelfth part of the Commerce of Europe, shall carry on a greater Commerce; but as all the others shall encrease theirs in proportion, it shall still carry on but the same twelfth part of the Commerce... Thus those Nations which have the most Conveniences to carry on Trade, shall continue to have the greatest Share in Trade. Now as the English, and especially the Dutch, will always have, *so long as they please*, more of those Conveniences than any other Nation, they will be able, *so long as they please*, to preserve the same Superiority over all other nations in Commerce, as they have always hitherto had; and when they shall cease to *please*, the other Nations will then do them no wrong to pick up what they do not any longer think worth their while together.' *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

eyebrow and retorted, 'You have forgotten, sir, to begin by sending a troop of missionaries, to dispose the hearts and intellects of Princes to such a work.'¹⁰¹

Both Fénelon and Saint-Pierre were to have their essays on the international order transformed by later eighteenth-century editors. Fénelon's Essay was published in English translation in 1720, by the nineteen-year-old Scot, William Grant, later Lord Prestongrange, with notes and a commentary substantially longer than the original essay. Saint-Pierre's essay was to undergo a better known, if no less thorough, reworking at the hands of Jean Jacques Rousseau. What both of these reworkings shared was their increased historical sensitivity to how the balance of power developed as a by-product of the progress of civilisation.

Grant began by commending Fénelon's defence of the balance of Europe, describing it as the article of the *ius gentium* of greatest importance, one that had emerged *necessarily* as a correction to an unimproved international order.¹⁰² He extolled it as a principle beyond party, as both the patriarchal and the contractual model for the origin of government rested upon a narrative of the dialectic of ambition and balance. From a patriarchal perspective, Grant argued, ambition, the passion upon which the desire for universal monarchy drew its strength, had not been merely coeval with the emergence of civil society, but its foundation. A plurality of societies had sprung up out of jealousy of the first innovator.¹⁰³ Fortunately, an underdeveloped people, 'rude in the Art of preserving the balance' failed to do so, and a true civil sovereignty had been able to form, one that closely resembled universal monarchy. On the contractual analysis that Grant

¹⁰¹ Tad Nugent, 'Introduction' to Jean Jaques Rousseau, *A Project for Perpetual Peace* (London, 1762), p.vii.

¹⁰² *Two Essays on the Balance of Europe*, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.



favoured, the fear of an ambitious neighbour had caused families to gather under a single banner, and this defensive league had effectively been the first civil society.¹⁰⁴ He argued that this dynamic was preserved in the subject matter of ancient poetry, for 'tis from a certain universal Sense of this ambitious Depravity in Man, and of the Value of whatever conduces to preserve a Balance, that the fabulous Heroes of antient times have been represented as employing their Vertue to delliver the Oppress'd, and to subdue Beasts, Monsters, and Tyrants, those Enemy's of the common Repose and Safety.'¹⁰⁵ Yet even taking the contractual model, society had been too unimproved to guard effectively against tyranny and conquest. The balance of power in its modern sense required communication between peoples, and early societies were too isolated to form effective confederacies; such a situation had only arisen within modern Europe.¹⁰⁶ Now, Grant argued, countries faced each other as had the fathers of great families in the state of nature, and the balance was the necessary security of the weak against the strong. Further to this, the balance of power both rested upon and served to augment commercial ties between states, a development that led to reciprocal improvement.¹⁰⁷

The lack of codified union between the states of Europe did not lesson the reality of a single society bound by a common *ius gentium* and mutual dependency. All of Europe thus had a single interest to the preservation of their common society, and this

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ 'As the first Societys of single Men afforded them not Safety only, but many Advantages and Conveniencys of Life, of which they were destitute in their separate State; so, in this general Society of Mankind, by a continual Intercourse of Nations, and an universal Commerce, every one reaps the Benefit of the Inventions and Products of all, and the Art of human Life is brought to Perfection. Which since, without such Commerce, it had never been, we might from hence alone argue for our Union of distinct Societys: No Country beign absolute and compleat in itself, but abounding with a superfluity of certain Commodities, and wanting others equally conducive to its Welfare; which plainly discovers the Relation it bears to other Country's, or to the States by whom they are inhabited'. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

amounted to a duty to prevent universal monarchy. Grant followed Fénelon in hesitating over whether this duty amounted to a sanction for a pre-emptive strike against a suspected aggressor.¹⁰⁸ He rehearsed and seconded the Archbishop's qualifications, coming down in favour of the legitimacy of such strikes on the grounds that a sovereign had an overriding duty to the protection of European society as a whole. Intriguingly, but perhaps not surprisingly from a future Lord of Session, Grant likened the maintenance of the balance to an act of distributive justice: 'Such a one cannot more justly complain of the retrenching his Exorbitancy, than cou'd that Man who abounded in Plenty, on his being robb'd of a Morsel of Bread by a Person ready to starve for Hunger, and who was compell'd to use that Violence for his own Preservation.'¹⁰⁹ Grant held that *in extremis*, private right must always be sacrificed to the public good, 'the part shou'd be subjected to the Whole,' provided it was done with moderation. State conduct, in the same manner as that of persons, could be either virtuous or vicious, and Grant felt it was his happy office to report that Great Britain had acted just such a virtuous role throughout her recent history.¹¹⁰ He ended by suggesting that the vision of the foreign policy of pacific

¹⁰⁸ 'One reason for his hesitation was that he understood the *ius gentium* to be rather more restrictive of pre-emptive strikes than modern scholarship now wishes to emphasise. 'But whether the bare suspicion of Ill from a Power capable by a rightfully acquired Strength to inflict it, be a just cause of using Force to prevent its farther growth, or future injury, may be justly called into question. For the most celebrated Writers on the Law of Nations agree in this, that (as in the Case of private Persons in the State of Nature) the Fear of a State, gives the rest no right to take Arms for reducing it, unless there be such evident Signs of a real Intention of injuring them as amount to a moral Certainty of their Danger; that they are to suppose the superior Power will contain itself within due Bounds, till the contrary appear; and that they are to provide against uncertain Dangers, not by Force, but by allowable and harmless Cautions, as by fortifying themselves, and uniting together. And this is most certainly true in all ordinary Cases, when there is no very exorbitant Superiority of one above the rest: yet it may not be utterly repugnant to our Author's Opinion in this latter Case.'

Ibid., pp. 44-45.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹⁰ 'And if at all times the observation would not hold good, tis true at least as the Affairs of *Europe* are now constituted. For we are now in an Age when our Society at large is fram'd, a Connexion of the whole preserv'd, and the Ballance and Liberty of *Europe* universally regarded with greatest Caution. And we are our selves the happy Nation, who ever since the firm Security of our own

kingship outlined at the close of Fénelon's essay was actually present in the happy government and pacific policies of George I, and that Great Britain, as the guardian of the European balance, had most fully realised that conquest was contrary to interest, and that in the balance lay the best protection of liberty and commerce.

While one can only imagine what the saintly Archbishop of Cambrai would have made of his essay being employed by a nineteen-year-old Scottish Presbyterian as a panegyric to British war policy, the Abbé was a friend and confidant of Rousseau's, and sympathised with his younger contemporary. Admirers of the Abbé's vision of a united Europe, such as the republican Mably seized the opportunity to pressure Jean Jacques Rousseau into editing and repackaging his works, including the *Perpetual Peace*, in a more forthright and engaging style. Rousseau agreed with alacrity, and in the summer of 1756, produced the *Extrait de la Paix perpétuelle*. Rousseau attempted to have the work published in a new journal, *Le Monde comme il est*, in 1760, but Rousseau's contribution failed to meet with the approval of the censor, and was dropped. It was therefore published later that year in Amsterdam.

An English translation, by Tad Nugent, the translator of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, appeared in 1762, at the time when Britain and France were engaged in negotiation of what was to emerge the next year as the Peace of Paris ending the Seven Years War. If Nugent had any intimations he was unleashing a turkey onto an

Libertys by settling a Ballance of Power between our Prince and People, have not only enjoy'd those Blessings at home, but by our Greatness and Power given Life and Vigour to their Cause abroad. We were the Head and Chief of the *European League*, founded on this common Cause, to reduce the Exorbitancy of a neighbouring Prince, who threatened the World with a universal Monarchy. Nor can we lose this noble Ardour, or quit the glorious Toil, whilst we are under the wise Government of a King, whose chiefest Care is to make his People happy; and yet with an extensive Goodness seeks the Benefit of all, and affects the Interest and Prosperity of the World.' *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

unsuspecting public, he certainly did not let on. 'The world may be more essentially benefited by the observation of his scheme', he rhapsodised, 'than by all the efforts hitherto published for encreasing human felicity, as it is the most extensive of all hitherto proposed.'

The problem for Nugent, as it had been for Pufendorf, lay in our classical education:

I have been frequently induced to think, that the military actions of the Greeks and Romans being rendered more illustrious by the writers of those nations than their legislative institutions, hath, in a great measure, contributed to stamp on the deeds of arms, a superior worth to those of legislation, and particularly in the minds of princes; but it seems probable, that were it sufficiently reflected upon, how much the genius of a legislator is superior to that of the most consummate general, how much more arduous the task, of planning and perfecting government, is than that of defeating armies, that intellect and virtue can alone be equal to the former, and casualty may, and frequently does, give victory to inferior understandings and vicious hearts, Sovereigns might be induced to relinquish the clamorous joy of triumph for the silent and self-approving enjoyment of spreading happiness on millions, and by that means the ambition of writing their renown in blood of half the plains of Europe, may yield to the perpetuation of it by legislative establishments of peace.¹¹¹

Rousseau's extract was in reality nothing of the sort. The work had been almost entirely rewritten, and with greater historical sophistication. However, it did glow with the same optimism: 'I step forth to behold', Rousseau declared, 'at least in idea, mankind uniting in love and friendship; I dispose myself to contemplate, of a sweet and peaceful society of brothers, living in eternal concord, all guided by the same maxims, all happy in one common felicity.' His strategy was to underscore at length the extent to which Europe was already a single system in most key respects. The post Utrecht system already provided for extensive commerce between European heads of state, and thus had gone some way towards preparing the ground for a more perfect Union.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. iv-v.

Besides these public confederacies, others less apparent, though not less real, may silently form themselves, by the union of interests, by the analogy of maxims, by the conformity of manners, and by other circumstances which permit the common relations, between divided nations, to submit. It is in this manner, that all the Potentates of Europe, form amongst themselves a kind of system, which unites them by the same religion, by the same law of nations, by manners, by letters, by commerce, and by every kind of equipoze, which is necessary to preserve, is not so easy to be broken, as many men are inclined to think.

Likewise religion served as a powerful connecting tissue between the disparate European states. Rome, in both its ancient imperial and its modern ecclesiastical incarnation, had bequeathed to Europe a single civilisation:

In this manner religion and the empire have formed the social link of various nations; which, without possessing any real community of interests, rights or dependance, enjoyed one of maxims and opinion; the influence of which still remained when the principle was destroyed. The antient image of the Roman Empire has continued to form a kind of combination amongst the members which composed it, and Rome possessing dominion in another manner, after the destruction of the Empire, there remained of that double chain a more close society amongst the nations of Europe, where the centre of their powers subsisted, than in the other parts of the world, of which the people, too distant for correspondence, have besides no particular subject of re-union.¹¹²

For this reason, European Union was a project less chimerical than would be the case for other continents such as Asia, America, or Africa, which were entirely too physically large and culturally varied for any such attempt. In Europe, however, such objections lacked force:

To this then must be added the particular situation of Europe, its more equal population and fertility, the closer union of its parts, and continual mixture of interests, that consanguinity, commerce, arts and colonies have distributed amongst the Sovereigns. Besides these, the number of rivers, and the variety of their courses, which render the communication of all parts easy. The inconstant disposition of the inhabitants, which invites them continually to travel, and to visit each others countries; the invention of printing, and the general taste in letters, which hath created amongst them a community of studies and of knowledge; in fine, the multitude and smallness of the states, which, united to the calls of luxury, and to the diversity of climates, render them mutually necessary to each other. All these causes combined form of Europe, not like Asia and Africa, an ideal collection of people, who have nothing in common but a name, but a real society, which has its religion,

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

manners, customs, and even its laws, from which no nation that composes a part of it, can separate itself without speedily exciting troubles and commotions.¹¹³

This was not to imply that Europe possessed a single public law. The crucial point for Rousseau was that while Europe may indeed, loosely speaking, be said to have a body of common laws, this common body was rife with contradiction, and so lacking in binding general principles, as to be of no great use in dubious cases. Self-interest would invariably dictate action, and 'war would be inevitable, even when parties would willingly be just'.¹¹⁴

There was no conceivable outcome of any of these wars likely to fundamentally bring about any lasting cessation of hostility. There was no reason to fear, and also no realistic reason to hope for, any sort of universal European monarchy. The national strengths of the individual European military monarchies were too neatly matched for that. To a greater degree than Saint-Pierre had suggested, Rousseau believed that the present system of Europe did indeed have certain stability, but it was not stability worth having. The predictable stability of perpetual war was not a system to celebrate:

But if the present system is immoveable, it is for that reason the more tempestuous; for there is between the powers of Europe, a continual action and re-action, which, without absolutely displacing, keeps them in perpetual agitation, and their efforts are always ineffectual and always generating, like the waves of the sea, which incessantly agitate the surface without ever changing the level; so that the subjects are continually harassed without any perceptible advantage to their sovereigns.¹¹⁵

In short, while there existed a genuine European *society*, one could not truly speak of a correspondingly genuine European *order*, if one took the word seriously. For Rousseau, all the weighty tomes of the Law of Nations, lovingly compiled by German professors, amounted to so much escapist fiction, and badly written fiction at that. There could be no

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

true Law of Nations, and indeed no prospect for a lasting peace in Europe, outwith a genuinely federal structure, such as the Abbé had proposed. Rousseau did not hold such a European Union to be a possible alternative, however. The failure was not in Saint-Pierre's reasoning, however, rather the capacity of sovereigns for right reason. While Rousseau's summary of the Abbé's project was to have no more effect on the hearts and minds of the sovereigns of Europe than the original, it did present a highly suggestive historical narrative of the progress of civilisation in Europe that made such a union tenable, a narrative that was to share much with Robertson's own.

III. John Campbell and the Interest of Great Britain

While the eighteenth century has been seen as something of a high water mark for utopian conceptions of international order, such as that presented by Saint-Pierre or Rousseau,¹¹⁶ it would be very wrong to suppose that the power of Saint-Pierre's argument put an end to the Pufendorfian project of writing the history of state interest. This certainly had not transpired in Britain, where as has been noted, Pufendorf's own history enjoyed such considerable success and imitation. Probably the most prominent of Pufendorf's British disciples was John Campbell, best known for his later involvement in the hugely ambitious publishing project of the multi-volume *Universal History*.¹¹⁷ While the *Universal History*, an encyclopaedia of all existing historical knowledge, was an endeavour as much commercial as intellectual, his earlier work, *The Present State of Europe*, could not have had a more contemporary polemical thrust. Campbell saw his work as following in a tradition of inquiry began by Rohan and continued by Pufendorf, that sought to provide the sort of general historical framework necessary for statesmen to comprehend the interests of the various states of Europe, so as better to understand that of their own. Campbell could be seen as providing an answer to Hume's query as to whether politics could be reduced to a science, arguing that the methodology of such a science lay in applying the doctrine of state interest to concrete situations.¹¹⁸ Britain's

¹¹⁶ On this tradition see Felix Gilbert 'The "New Diplomacy" of the Eighteenth Century' *World Politics*, 4 (1951) pp. 1-38.

¹¹⁷ John Campbell remains a somewhat neglected figure. But see, in addition to the writings of Guido Abbattista, Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, religion, and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994) chapters 2-3.

¹¹⁸ 'The SCIENCE I mean is POLITICKS; by which I understand a comprehensive Knowledge of the fundamental Maxims of Policy, grounded upon the actual and real Interests of the several Governments of EUROPE; and this is not only a polite as well as a useful kind of Learning, the Study of which may be therefore recommended without Pedantry, but is in Reality a Point of great Consequence; because without this Knowledge it will be a Thing very difficult, if not impracticable, for a young Gentleman to qualify himself for the Service of his Country; in the

present situation as a great commercial power had aroused the attention and interest of all Europe, and therefore it would be neither possible nor desirable to remain aloof from continental affairs. In Campbell's view this called for an increased attention to statecraft and provided works, such as his own, with a new relevance.¹¹⁹

Campbell followed convention in arguing that the correct knowledge of interest was the necessary prerequisite for prudent political action, yet his view of the content of that knowledge differed from that of Pufendorf. For Pufendorf, the science of interest lay in prudently discerning real from imaginary interest; sovereigns either acted according to prudent calculation of advantage or they were deluded by blind passion. Campbell was more concerned to emphasise that the study of interest was above all the study of opinion. Understanding interest thus entailed learning to see through the eye of the interested party. Campbell was able to quote Rohan with approval, while subtly altering the Duke's meaning: 'It is the Notion that the governing Part of any Community has of this kind of Science,' Campbell wrote, 'that in one Sense is properly stiled INTEREST, and in this Sense it is that an illustrious and able *French* Politician says truly, and with great Spirit, that Kings govern Nations, and Interest governs Kings: *Les Princes commandent aux Peuples, & l'Interest commande aux Princes.*'

Campbell was as concerned as Pufendorf had been with the way in which state interest was determined by constitutional form. 'The first Thing therefore that is requisite to be understood in practical Politicks,' he argued, 'is the true State of the Government

present Times more especially, when to be able to have a thorough Notion of the *Interests* of *Great Britain* is not barely expedient, but absolutely necessary to have a clear Insight into the *Concerns* of all the *European Powers*.' J. Campbell, *The Present State of Europe* (London, 1757) p. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

subsisting in any Country.’¹²⁰ Nonetheless, a few general principles tended to inform the interest of states, regardless of the present state of its constitution. The first, though no longer as decisive as in ages past, was religion. Also important were alliances, existing and potential, as well as the geographical situation of a state. Just as key was a state’s relative situation, i.e. whether it was in a state of rise or decline, and lastly, what claims or pretensions one state had over another. True statesmanship was the ability to apply these tests to concrete situations.¹²¹

As confessional allegiance remained the primary determinant of national interest for Campbell, no single state was more central to the political interest of Europe as a whole than the See of Rome. Campbell followed Pufendorf in viewing the ‘Spiritual Monarchy of Rome’¹²² almost entirely in political terms. The politician in Campbell was clearly fascinated by the figure of the Pope. In contrast to much contemporary Protestant analysis of the papal power, which all too frequently degenerated into denunciations of priestcraft and bovine superstition, Campbell, as a scientist of opinion, was concerned with the vexing question as how an assertion of authority so patently absurd could hold so many in thrall so effectively. Campbell likened the papacy to the leaning tower of Pisa, which ‘tho’ it seems to carry evident Marks of Weakness, is in fact a Structure very strong in itself, contrived with great skill, as well as erected with much Art.’ In the minds

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²¹ ‘It requires great Force of Mind, much Application, and a large Compass of Knowledge, to apply these general Principles to each particular State. A superior Genius, capable of this in its utmost Extent, and with the highest Degree of Perfection, becomes a consummate Statesman; one fit not to assist only, but even to direct the greatest Monarch. And therefore the Emperor CHARLES V. who was at once the wisest and most fortunate Prince of the Age in which he lived, had Reason to say to his son PHILIP II. when he introduced to him his Secretary *Eraso*, the Day after he had resigned to him so many kingdoms, and recommended him to his Service; “The Present I make you now, is greater than that which I made you yesterday; Quanto os he dado este dia, no es tanto que daros este criado’. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²² He also follows Pufendorf in his use of the term.

of the followers of the Roman rite, the person of the pope assumed a literal aura of divinity, the efficacy of which, Campbell claimed, Protestants tended to lose sight.¹²³ This made it all the more fascinating for him that the office of pope was so often filled by commoners. Ironically, the Spiritual Monarchy of Rome offended Campbell's own hierarchical conception of the natural distinction of ranks in society:

If we consider that the Popes rise to that Dignity from very inferior Stations, were heretofore frequently, and still sometimes of mean Families, without any Support from Kindred or Relations, deriving a great Part of their Revenues from the Subjects of other Princes, and this in Virtue of their claiming a Share in their Allegiance, exercising an Authority grounded only in Opinion, and frequently assuming a Superiority over those to whom they have not only been themselves in Obedience, but have also rendered them domestick Offices in the Nature of Servants: When, I say, we consider all this, with a Multitude of other Particulars, that every intelligent Reader's Memory will furnish, we cannot help wondering that this *Ecclesiastical Empire* has stood for so long, grown up to so great a Height, and continues yet to enjoy a green old Age, that does not seem to betray any Symptoms of a speedy Dissolution.¹²⁴

Campbell thought Protestantism suffered a competitive disadvantage *vis à vis* Rome; it was overwhelmingly a spiritual movement, and was not calculated for political gain. The papacy, on the other hand, was free to act as mediator and interlocutor between Catholic states, thereby earning their gratitude and their realisation that the propagation of Catholic doctrine was to their own political advantage.¹²⁵ Campbell lamented that, with

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

¹²⁵ 'The close Connection between the Clergy in all Popish Countries and the Court of *Rome*, joined to the occasional Benefits that Monarchs themselves may receive by Bulls from the Holy See, makes them unwilling to interpose, or break off that Commerce which their Subjects have wit *Rome*, that upon certain Occasions they may derive Favours from thence, which may easily procure what otherwise might with Difficulty be forced by their own Authority. The Subjection of the Clergy to a foreign Head makes them sometimes more tractable to their natural Sovereigns than they otherwise would be, since the Good-will and Friendship fo a *single Person* is more easily attained, than the Direction of *many*, and besides in those Cases there can be no Appeal to the People, because in all such Disputes they think an implicity Submission to the Duty of the Clergy. We may add to this another Reason, which is, that the Popish Princes cherish the *Spiritual Power* of the *Pope*, as the Means of preserving Unity of Religion, and thereby preventing religious Disputes, which very seldom disturb the Church, without disturbing the State also. Thus it appears, that independent of Enthusiasm and Superstition, political Principles have no small Share in promoting that Adherence to the *See of Rome*, which at first Sight seems so irreconcilable to the absolute

the passing of its original zeal, Protestantism, both in its theology and in its sectarianism, seemed designed for political impotence.¹²⁶

The relative strength of the Catholic position in Europe was the primary justification for a policy of engagement with continental Europe. Those who clamoured for the renewal of splendid isolation had not sufficiently come to terms with the fact that interests change over time, and what might have been a prudent course of action in agespast was by no means necessarily so today. The 'blue water' policy that Campbell dated back to the early seventeenth century had become the delusion of sentimental patriots.¹²⁷ Campbell preferred, in any case, to indulge his nostalgia in other periods. Campbell, in a move seemingly no less typical of interest of state discourse as patriotic Whig discourse, harkened back to the gilded age of Gloriana as the time when Britain's foreign policy was conducted in perfect accordance with her true interest.

The wise Queen *Elizabeth*, who laid the Foundation of the Wealth and Power which we now possess, acted upon quite different Principles, and was so far from paying no Attention to foreign Affairs, that it plainly appears they were never so well understood or managed as in her Time. She it was that prevented *Philip II.* from accomplishing his Scheme of universal Empire, not barely by providing for the Security of her Dominions at home, but by employing both Money and Men to occupy him with perpetual Diversions abroad. She prevented *France* from becoming a Province to *Spain*, which must have been fatal to the Liberties of *Europe*; and she afforded that Assistance to the *States* of the *United Provinces*, that enabled them to become an independent Republick, which has in succeeding Times contributed so much to preserve the Independence of the *European Powers* against the ambitious Views of the House of *Bourbon*.¹²⁸

Elizabeth was the first English monarch to pay proper heed to commerce and imperial

Authority of *Sovereign Princes*, and which notwithstanding by their dextrous Management is often made to co-operate with'. *Ibid.*, pp. 424-425.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

expansion.¹²⁹ Campbell argued that the greatness of any state lay in the size of her population, and that the chief cause of the increase of British population lay in her overseas colonies. Demand in any economy had a finite limit, yet the creation of new markets overseas with an increased need for supply from the mother country had the effect of augmenting domestic employment and prosperity.¹³⁰ As such, Campbell argued that the interest and the commerce of the British Empire were really the same entity under different description. 'For Commerce is that Tie, by which the several, and even the most distant Parts of this Empire, are connected and kept together, so as to be rendered Parts of the same Whole.'¹³¹ Commercial interests further dictated that the liberty of Europe be preserved, for if the states of Europe were to fall under the spell of a universal hegemon, the effect would be to 'naturally and even necessarily . . . lessen the Number of Inhabitants, to extinguish Industry amongst them, and consequently to enfeeble and impoverish them, which must be detrimental to us, if we correspond to trade with them.'¹³²

It was in Britain's commercial interest to maintain the balance of power in Europe. In concrete terms this entailed maintaining the alliance with the Habsburgs against the French.¹³³ Campbell was at some pains to moderate the more rabid Whig

¹²⁹ 'It is true, that she likewise promoted the Navigation and Commerce of her Subjects, opened a Passage for them into both the *Indies*, and excited that Spirit which afterwards induced us to make Settlements in the most distant Parts of the Globe; and by a wise and happy conjunction of our Labours both there and in *Britain*, at once extended our Wealth and Power, without the least Diminution of our People, contrary to the Effects of Plantations made from other Countries, which have suffered at home, by aggrandizing themselves abroad; whereas our domestick Power is constantly augmented in Proportion to the Advantages derived from our Settlements abroad; and to this circulation of our Commerce it is in reality owing, that our Strength is so much greater, our Lands so much more valuable, and our intrinsic Wealth so much increased, as it since that Time; and this, in spite of long Wars, and other intervening Accidents, not at all favourable to our Interests.' *Ibid.*, p. 508.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 511.

¹³³ 'In supporting that august Family in three several Wars, we justified our Fidelity to our Treaties,

polemic that the French were Catholic therefore tyrannical therefore always and everywhere a clear and present danger to Britain's mixed constitution. At times France had played out this role and at times it had not. It was thus the role of the prudent British statesmen to keep a level head concerning French intentions. It was policy, not religious zeal or endemic xenophobia, that had historically informed British hostility to French foreign policy.

It is that Cause that we support, and not an innate, hereditary, and groundless Aversion to the French Nation; for whenever their Statesmen shall abandon that Plan which is dangerous and destructive in its Nature to themselves as well as others, they will infallibly disarm us, and extinguish that Animosity which their boundless Ambition, and not our Obstinacy or Perverseness, has excited. There have been, within memory of the present Generation, certain Seasons, in which the French ministers either really or seemingly laid by those Schemes, and affected to act upon other Principles, and that very soon produced an Alteration in the conduct of other Powers towards them, which fully justifies this Observation; and therefore their Politicians have no just Grounds for imputing to the Fierceness of our Manners, that Alacrity we have shewn in entering into all Alliances against them, but ought rather to describe it to that Rectitude of Judgment which is natural to a free People, and which will always appear amongst us as long as we continue free.¹³⁴

Campbell held that an irrationally jealous stance against French ambition would ultimately prove contrary to British interest, which was to pursue her own commerce at peace with her neighbours. It was an implicit critique of the imprudence of the past conduct of British policy to underscore the point that the rage of party had no place in the conduct of debate. Immoderate passion in the maintenance of hostilities led statesmen to overplay their hand, and to lose sight of the fact that the British Empire was designed for preservation, and not for increase. Campbell remarked therefore that,

at this Day our Princes can have no Temptation to enterprising Wars of Conquest as in former Times; so that a true Spirit of Patriotism can never

which in itself is a Point ever of the highest Consequence, as it is a Kind of national Honour, which once lost can hardly ever be regained...there be no other way than this of supporting the general Balance of Power, and maintaining that Independence which is the primary Point in our foreign System, we acted well and wisely in sustaining.' *Ibid.*, p. 513.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

be shewn, in opposing Projects that will never be set on foot; and in this lies our great happiness, that having no Views or Pretensions upon our Neighbours, there is no solid, indeed not so much as a plausible Ground for us to hate them, or they us. This is the true fundamental Principle of our Policy; that in respect to the Affairs of the Continent, we are not to be governed by any of those temporary or accidental Conveniences, which very often, and that justly too, pass for Reasons of State in other kingdoms; but by this single Rule, of their acting in Conformity to our natural Interests, so far as is consistent with their own.¹³⁵

Campbell was here rehearsing a familiar Whig trope in reversing Machiavelli's typology of empires, commercial preservation in preference to territorial expansion. The practical import of such an analysis was to underscore the wisdom of a blue water policy, which was a shift of emphasis from continental power politics to the pursuit of overseas commerce. To drive this point home was the central theme of his Pufendorfian discussion of the present state and true interests of Europe. One may be sceptical whether Pufendorf would have approved.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

Conclusion

The preceding chapter has thus sought to demonstrate how an historical discourse stemming from a language of reason of state and overwhelmingly preoccupied with the interest of states and the balance of power between them became pervasive in early modern Europe. This discourse developed from one preoccupied with the relationship between interest and confession to one preoccupied with commercial interest. This discourse was not only historically sensitive but produced an 'interest of states' historiographical sub-genre that threatened to inflate into universal history. Yet it could be argued that discussion of a European state 'system' remained at this point relatively under-developed, far more concerned with promoting the interests of individual states in a state of nature than in analysing how this state of nature developed and functioned in the modern world. Narrative and macronarrative had yet to converge; the European state system, in short, awaited its first systematiser. The first to attempt such a project was the philosopher and historian David Hume, whose work the next chapter will address.

Chapter Two: David Hume's History of Europe

The previous chapter suggested that the balance of power had emerged as an historically sensitive critique of state action and had evolved in accordance with developments in the understanding of the historically specific nature of 'interest' itself. The Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume was to push the argument much further in his attempt to tell the history of British statecraft in terms of the preservation of the European balance. Of all historians of the English Parnassus beneath Tobias Smollett, no two were seated more uncomfortably close than William Robertson and David Hume.¹ Friends² and sometime rivals, the two are rightly, if rather casually, grouped together as exponents of a similar style of 'philosophical history', in which narrations of war and diplomacy were contextualised through parallel histories of manners and of the progress of society. One should be cautious, however, in aligning the Presbyterian minister and the infidel too closely. A trenchantly sceptical history can only have so much to do with an historical theodicy such as Robertson's, particularly when both, at least in part, chronicled the history of Europe in an age of religious war.

The relationship between the historiography of Hume and Robertson has not been entirely neglected by modern scholarship. Much of this has centred on such local issues as their contrasting assessment of the guilt of Mary Queen of Scots, their naturally contrasting assessments of the Reformation, and Hume's scepticism concerning Robertson's choice of Charles V as subject matter. The dominant themes of Robertson's

¹ The phrase relates to a joke of Hume's, who did not particularly value Smollett's contribution to the art of history.

² It is difficult to be entirely sure precisely how warm their personal relationship was. Their correspondence clearly reveals mutual admiration as well as no small amount of self-admiration for their ability to transcend professional rivalry.

historiography, the development of the European balance of power and the expansion of European empire, have been relatively neglected themes in Hume's own historiography. This is not without cause, as the two have seldom been seen to pursue the same subject. Hume's *History* has been persuasively described as fundamentally a history of English liberty, with a focus squarely kept on the development of the constitutional balance between liberty and authority. The *History* asserted that English liberty was a modern phenomenon, only recently settled as a result of the events of 1688-89, and had as its centre a revisionist account of the civil wars of the mid-seventeenth century, where Hume 'dared shed a tear for King Charles'. From such a perspective, Duncan Forbes was undoubtedly correct in describing the narratives of the reigns of James I and Charles I as constituting 'by far the most important period in the whole *History*.'³ Yet lengthy sections of *The History of England* were devoted to assessing the prudence of English monarchs as they played out their roles on the international stage. In fact, the narratives of the reigns of the late Stuarts, and particularly those of the late Tudors, were almost entirely given over to foreign affairs. Hume was quite explicit about this. In his volume on Elizabethan history, he stated that 'England furnishes few materials for history, except the small part she took in foreign transactions.'⁴ The subject matter of Hume's chapters on foreign developments was the balance of power, a term that had three distinct meanings as applied to Hume's historiography. First, it related to the fluctuating balance between the republican and the monarchical, or the liberal and authoritarian, aspects of

³ Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975). Karen O'Brien has been largely alone in arguing that, on the contrary, the more internationally orientated Tudor volumes instead formed the 'argumentative heart' of the history. cf. *Narratives of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1997) p. 92. As O'Brien has sought to portray Hume's *History* as a 'cosmopolitan narrative', this is only natural. The present chapter, however, is as concerned with the limits as with the extent of any such 'cosmopolitanism'.

⁴ Hume, *The History of England*, (Indianapolis, 1983) IV, p. 178.

the English constitution. In this sense, 'the balance of power' was indeed the central theme of the entire *History*. Hume primarily understood the term, however, in its more normal sense as the 'maxim of prudence' regarding foreign affairs, where prudence consisted in siding with the weaker rather than the stronger player in an existing conflict, and thus preserving the balance. This understanding in turn implied a third and more 'philosophical' sense, also central to Hume's historical thinking, of the equilibrium of arms and revenue of the modern European states system. If the balance between and within states was peripheral if important to Hume, it was of course the explicit subject of Robertson's historical enquiries. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to explore these Robertsonian themes in Hume's *History*, to explore the extent to which Hume's writings set up, solved, or left ambiguous problems Robertson was later to pursue. Such a task requires caution. Trawling Hume's historical narratives on the hunt for universal truths is often self-defeating, for prudence, the virtue according to which his monarchs were weighed in the balance, had few fixed points of reference. The foundation of modern English liberty was the Revolution settlement of 1689, primarily an event in the history of the English constitution, but one made possible by the state of play of the religious and power politics of continental Europe. As Hume was to present it, William III had never sought the English crown for its own sake, but as an opportunity to harness the economic and military capacity of England in the service of defensive wars against French hegemony in which she had remained aloof for generations.

The future interests of Hume the historian were clearly discernible in the work of the philosopher. Hume invoked the revolution strategically and quite strikingly in his

first published work, the *Treatise on Human Nature*.⁵ Much of Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* can be understood as providing the psychological underpinnings of political action, of both the ruler and the ruled. It is certainly beyond the scope of the present chapter to attempt an exegesis of the *Treatise*. The intention here is only to demonstrate the role played by the historical event of the revolution within it, and to point how such a role would condition any later attempt to narrate it more fully.

The *Treatise* contained three distinct books, on the Imagination, on the Passions, and on Morals. The centrepiece of Book III was a lengthy section on justice. Justice was an 'artificial,' as opposed to a 'natural' virtue, which is to say it was based on convention rather than human nature. Such a view of justice naturally had potentially troubling implications for the grounding of political obligation. Indeed, in a sense, Hume offered no such grounding at all. His interest lay rather in the psychology of allegiance. This was perhaps the greatest *arcana* of any politics, ancient or modern, not how the one ruled the many, but rather what patterns of thought drove the many to adhere so passionately to the one. Hume began with a psychological, rather than a historical, account of the origin of government. Human beings were fundamentally governed by a sense of preserving their own interest.⁶ The natural operations of the passions, directed by the imagination,

⁵ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Propriety, property and prudence: David Hume and the defence of the Revolution' in Phillipson and Skinner (eds), *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 303.

⁶ 'Nothing is more certain, than that men are, in a great measure, govern'd by interest, and that even when they extend their concern beyond themselves, 'tis not to any great distance; nor is it usual for them, in common life, to look farther than their nearest friends and acquaintance. 'Tis no less certain, that 'tis impossible for men to consult their interest in so effectual a manner, as by an universal and inflexible observance of the rules of justice, by which alone they can preserve society, and keep themselves from falling into that wretched and savage condition, which is commonly represented as the *state of nature*. And as this interest, which all men have in the upholding of society, and the observation of the rules of justice, is so great, so is it palpable and evident, even o the most rude and uncultivated of the human race; and 'tis almost impossible for any one, who has had experience of society, to be mistaken in this particular. Since, therefore, men are so sincerely attach'd to their interest, and their interest is o much concern's I nthe observance of justice, and this interest is so certain and avow'd; it may be ask'd, how any disorder can ever arise in society, and what principle there is in human nature so *powerful* as to

necessarily focus one on the present, rather than distant concerns. 'This is the reason,' explained Hume, 'why men so often act in contradiction to their known interest; and in particular why they prefer any trivial advantage, that is present, to the maintenance of order in society, which so much depends on the observance of justice.'⁷

But to understand human psychology only in such terms would be unduly pessimistic. The very fact that our imagination projects weakly into the future prevents our passions from clouding our sense of interest regarding those very future events. Though the desire to misbehave might be for the present moment unstoppable, we can all readily enough decide to behave well tomorrow. Almost all squabble and rancour over the rights and wrongs of particular allegiances were based not upon 'reason,' but upon 'bigotry and superstition.' All of this had troubling implications for the more casual rights language upon which Whiggery relied, and Hume was well aware of this. 'But here,' Hume announced, 'an *English* reader will be apt to enquire concerning that famous *revolution*, which has been attended with such mighty consequences.'⁸ Hume's decision to break with his normal preference of drawing historical examples from antiquity and to incorporate a concrete historical event was startling. He noted that while he had already admitted of the need for a doctrine of limited resistance, as a generalised principle, such a doctrine was impossible for a sovereign power to allow codified. In a mixed constitution, the silence of laws should not be mistaken for legislative deference to the executive, but assigned rather to legislative prudence. Yet it was manifestly in the public interest for this species of liberty to exist. A form of government, or indeed a branch of government,

overcome so strong a passion, or so *violent* as to obscure so clear a knowledge? D. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, eds. A. L. Shelby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978) p. 534.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 563.

unable to protect its interests by force if necessary was hardly in a position to fulfil its original remit. 'So 'tis a gross absurdity to suppose, in any government', Hume maintained, 'a right without a remedy, or allow, that the supreme power is shared with the people, without allowing, that 'tis lawful for them to defend their share against every invader. Those, therefore, who would seem to respect our free government, and yet deny the right of resistance, have renounced all pretensions to common sense, and do not merit a serious answer'.⁹ Hume insisted that it was not his purpose to deliver a particular defence of the revolution, but only to reflect on general questions to which it gave rise. The modern reader cannot help but find this assertion somewhat disingenuous, as his discussion of general issues was entirely geared to demonstrate the psychological plausibility of the perspective of the revolutionaries. It was entirely natural for the mind to associate the tyranny of James II with apprehension of his heirs, and thus to wish their exclusion from any future line of succession.

In the *Treatise* Hume also briefly touched on the Robertsonian theme of the relationship between regularity of government and military capacity. As we shall see, for Robertson, only regular governments are capable of concerted action on the international stage. Hume was interested in this connection as it pertained to civil war and the dissolution of government:

Now foreign war to a society without government necessarily produces civil war. Throw any considerable goods among men, they instantly fall a quarelling, while each strives to get possession of what pleases him, without regard to the consequences. In a foreign war the most considerable of all goods, life, and limbs, are at stake; and as every one shuns dangerous posts, seizes the best arms, seeks excuse for the slightest wounds, the rules of society, which may be well enough observ'd, when men were calm, can now no longer take place, when they are in such commotion.¹⁰

Experience reveals that only a regular government may engage in external aggression and

⁹ Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, p. 564.

¹⁰ *Treatise*, p. 540.

expect to maintain its integrity. To say as much implied a narrative the *Treatise* did not seek to provide. The progress of society was, at one level, a story of the development of constitutional irregularity towards regularity throughout the various polities of Europe. The treatment of such themes in the *Treatise* remained perhaps more incidental and suggestive than systematically pursued. Hume's *Essays*, however, more explicitly set as problems a number of the themes Robertson would pursue in relation to the balance of power and the European state system.

At first it seemed Hume was disinclined to view foreign history structurally or philosophically, more a sea of distant contingency. In 1742 he argued,

The domestic and gradual revolutions of a state must be a more proper study of reasoning and observation, than the foreign and the violent, which are commonly produced by single persons, and are more influenced by whim, folly, or caprice, by general passions and interests. The depression of the lords, and rise of the commons in ENGLAND, after the statutes of alienation and the encrease of trade and industry, are more easily accounted for by general principles, than the depression of the SPANISH, and rise of the FRENCH monarchy, after the death of CHARLES QUINT. Had Harry IV. Cardinal RICHELIEU, and LOUIS XIV. been SPANIARDS; and PHILIP II. III. and IV. and CHARLES II. been FRENCHMEN, the history of these two nations had been entirely reversed.¹¹

If foreign transactions were a mere sequence of accidents, one could not, with any sense, seek for them any causal explanation. International history would not seem an appropriate subject for philosophical history. Hume thought the point worth repeating in his 1752 essay 'Of Commerce'. In defence of the sort of 'general reasoning' often necessary in philosophy from any charge of abstruseness, Hume insisted this was precisely the sort of reasoning necessary for the statesman. 'It is also the chief business of politicians;' Hume maintained, 'especially in the domestic part of the state, where the public good, which is, or ought to be their object, depends on the concurrence of a

¹¹ David Hume 'Of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences' in *Political Works*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1995), p. 59.

multitude of causes; not, as in foreign politics, on accidents and chances, and the caprices of a few persons.¹² If foreign politics, and hence foreign history, was of no particular use to the statesman, then, in neo-classical terms, the study was flatly denied its principal justification. For Hume, however, history was also a polite genre, and he harboured ambitions of a far more diverse readership for history than statesmen and magistrates. Yet while pressing the point that if women wished to provide genuine intellectual stimulation to men in conversation, Hume recommended they would need to possess a sound grasp of the histories of ancient Greek and Roman history, as well as that of their own country. The seventeenth century development, associated with Samuel Pufendorf, away from classical subjects and classical values, and towards careful study of the circumstances and interests of one's neighbours, did not figure in Hume's recommendations either for entertainment or for instruction. To some extent Hume remained a classicist and retained the interests of a classicist, and here the extent of Hume's internationalism can reasonably be brought into question. Robertson, as we shall see, was at great pains to demonstrate precisely the opposite. That historian sought to discern those deep causes that underlie such phenomena as the depression of the Spanish and the rise of the French, and recommended such subjects as the most useful to those in public life. In doing so he rejected his friend's recommendation that he discard such plans and choose a classical subject instead.

Hume's historiographical conservatism was highly paradoxical, for Hume sought through philosophical history to augment classical values scarcely less than Pufendorf. Nor could he be said to have ever taken an antiquarian or parochial view of his subject matter. Hume, almost uniquely among the historians of the Scottish Enlightenment,

¹² Hume 'Of Commerce' in *Political Essays*, p. 94.

extended his narrative into the stormy waters of the civil and ecclesiastical tumults of the seventeenth century, waters Robertson himself conspicuously avoided entering. And within his own civil narratives, Hume consistently demonstrated the complex inter-relation between the domestic and the European balance of power. Clearly 'foreign contingency' did not imply any lack of domestic relevance. Hume was instead thoroughly a modern in his outlook who found a comparative approach comparing different nations that are contemporaries, where we both judge more impartially, and can better set in opposition those manners, with which we are sufficiently acquainted.¹³

Hume described a certain type of interaction among states as a pre-requisite of Enlightenment itself:

*That nothing is more favourable to the rise of politeness and learning, than a number of neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy. The emulation, which naturally arises among those neighbouring states, is an obvious source of improvement: But what I would chiefly insist on is the stop, which such limited territories give both to power and authority*¹⁴

Hume was concerned here with the connection between power and knowledge. In a sense, he was merely rehearsing the old trope that literature could flourish only where liberty was enjoyed. A balanced system of states allowed for intellectual competition and mitigated cultural imperialism. But there was a problem. Such an explanation could well account for the revival of European letters, but could in no way account for the fact that modern politeness as a European phenomenon was essentially courtly and French in origin.¹⁵ *Le bon David* felt a sense of cultural cringe on two levels, as a Scot towards

¹³ 'Of Refinement in the Arts' p. 112.

¹⁴ Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences *Political Essays*, p. 64.

¹⁵ 'The FRENCH are the only people, except the Greeks, who have been at once philosophers, poets, orators, historians, painters, architects, sculptors, and musicians. With regard to the stage, they have excelled even the GREEKS, who far excelled the ENGLISH. And, in common life, they have, in a great measure, perfected that art, the most useful and agreeable of any, *l'Art de Vivre*, the art of society and conversation.' 'Of Civil Liberty', p. 53.

England and as a north-Briton towards France. As a Scot he was drawn to English liberty and as a Briton towards the clear superiority of French cultural achievement. Hume could partly square this circle by insisting that the narrative civil liberty in French history was ill understood. 'It may now be affirmed of civilized monarchies', Hume famously postulated, 'what was formerly said in praise of republics alone, *that they are a government of Laws, not of Men*'.¹⁶

Hume saw a strong parallel between the conditions necessary for learning and those necessary for commerce. But again, there was a problem, as France stubbornly refused to conform to this model.

The three greatest trading towns now in the world, are LONDON, AMSTERDAM, and HAMBURGH; all free cities, and protestant cities; that is, enjoying a double liberty. It must, however, be observed, that the great jealousy entertained of late, with regard to the commerce of FRANCE, seems to prove, that this maxim is no more certain and infallible than the foregoing, and that the subjects of an absolute prince may become our rivals in commerce, as well as in learning.¹⁷

Hume admired French commerce distinctly less than he did culture, and was rather less inclined to present a French economy *bien policé*, or contemporary understanding of French economic practice as well founded.¹⁸

Our jealousy and our hatred of FRANCE are without bounds; and the former sentiment, at least, must be acknowledged reasonable and well-grounded. These passions have occasioned innumerable barriers and obstructions upon commerce, where we are accused of being commonly the aggressors. But what have we gained by the bargain? We lost the FRENCH market for our woolen manufactures, and transferred the commerce of wine to SPAIN and PORTUGAL, where we buy worse liquor at a higher price. There are so few ENGLISHMEN who would not think their country absolutely ruined, were FRENCH wines sold in ENGLAND so cheap and in such abundance as to supplant, in some measure,

¹⁶ 'Of Civil Liberty,' p. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁸ The greatest abuses, which arise in FRANCE, the most perfect model of pure monarchy, proceed not from the number or weight of the taxes, beyond what are to be met with in free countries; but from the expensive, unequal, arbitrary, and intricate method of levying them, by which the industry of the poor, especially of the peasants and farmer is, in a great measure, discouraged, and agriculture rendered a beggarly and slavish employment.' *Ibid.*, p. 56.

all ale, and home-brewed liquors: But would we lay aside prejudice, it would not be difficult to prove, that nothing could be more innocent, perhaps advantageous. Each new acre of vineyard planted in FRANCE, in order to supply ENGLAND with wine, would make it requisite for the FRENCH to take the produce of an ENGLISH acre, sown in wheat or barley, in order to subsist themselves; and it is evident, that we should thereby get command of the better commodity.¹⁹

Yet Hume insisted that the greatest threat to English liberty and commerce remained French commercial and military aggression. In the *Essays*, through all their editions, remained this fundamental tension regarding the nature of France, or rather, the sort of polite, moderate view of France that a modern Briton should hold. One well established theme of Hume's political advocacy was that vulgar Whig sharp dichotomies between English liberty and French slavery were potentially catastrophic in their commercial and military consequences, and revealed no clear understanding of the history or politics of either state.

This perception underlies almost all of Hume's various Essays, but in none so directly as in 'Of the balance of power.' Hume raised in this essay the problem of the relative antiquity of the *idea* of balance. Surely the modern politics of a Europe of rival but interconnected states resembled nothing so much as the ancient politics of Greek cities. Our interest lies less in Hume's answer to his own question than in how he supposed the actual process came to exist in modern Europe. Hume outlined a truncated Harringtonian narrative of a transition from ancient to modern prudence, enjoyment of the latter mitigated by fear of a return to the former in new forms:

After the fall of the ROMAN empire, the form of government, established by the northern conquerors, incapacitated them, in a great measure, for farther conquests, and long maintained each state in its proper boundaries. But when vassalage and the feudal militia were abolished, mankind were anew alarmed by the danger of universal monarchy, from the union of so many kingdoms and principalities in the person of the emperor CHARLES. But the power of the house of AUSTRIA, founded on extensive but divided dominions, and their

¹⁹ 'Of the Balance of Trade', p. 141.

riches, derived chiefly from mines of gold and silver, were more likely to decay, of themselves, from internal defects, than to overthrow all the bulwarks raised against them. In less than a century, the force of that violent and haughty race was shattered, their opulence dissipated, their splendour eclipsed. A new power succeeded, more formidable to the liberties of Europe, possessing all the advantages of the former and labouring under none of its defects; except a share of that bigotry and persecution, with which the house of AUSTRIA was so long, and still is so much infatuated.

That new power, of course, was France, and that 'share of bigotry and persecution', her Roman Catholicism. It would have better facilitated the moderation of public discourse to sever the link between the inquisitorial Spain of Phillip II and the ascendant France of Colbert, but this was a strategy Hume did not pursue; he underscored, rather than severed, the confessional nature of the French threat. What was striking here is the extent to which the great sceptic presented unreconstructed the vulgar-Whiggish narrative of modern European history as a succession of *translatio tyrannii*, with each Catholic aspirant a would be Babylonian tyrant with Britain as the last line of defence:

In the general wars, maintained against this ambitious power, GREAT BRITAIN has stood foremost; and she still maintains her station. Beside her advantages of riches and situation, her people are animated with such a national spirit and are so fully sensible of the blessings of their government, that we may hope their vigor never will languish in so necessary and so just a cause.

What connection, if any, existed between the confession of the Catholic monarchs and their aggressive stance will be pursued at a later point. Hume here added his crucial qualification. 'On the contrary,' he remarked, 'if we may judge by the past, their passionate ardour seems rather to require some moderation; and they have oftener erred from a laudable excess than from a blameable deficiency.' John Robertson has argued that deletions of a few of the more incendiary passages of this and related essays after the British victory of the Seven Years War represented a substantial shift in Hume's assessment of the threat of universal monarchy after the Peace of Paris. There could be

‘no serious basis for rivalry’ as ‘no serious aspirant could be identified’.²⁰ This seems an overstatement. There is no questioning that further moderation was the general trajectory of the development of Hume’s analysis, but moderation is not the same as elimination. To be only moderately alarmed was to be alarmed all the same.

There were, for Hume, three fundamental problems in pursuing this rivalry at all costs. ‘We seem to have been more possessed with the ancient GREEK spirit of jealous emulation, than actuated by the prudent views of modern politics.’ This psychological posture coupled with a zero sum understanding of the balance of trade had resulted in commerce becoming ‘a reason of state.’ Hume remarked that Anglo-French conflict began ‘with justice, and even, perhaps, from necessity’, but had been pursued with an undue zealousness, prolonging such wars far longer than necessary. A second problem lay in the fact that Britain’s implacable hostility to France was all too well known to her continental allies, who were under no incentive to moderate their own behaviour if they knew full well they would always have the British treasury to fall back on. The third problem was that Britain’s method of funding these extensive continental wars was reliance on paper currency and national debt, a course of action that filled Hume with the most intense foreboding. ‘To mortgage our revenues at so deep a rate, in wars, where we are only accessories, was surely the most fatal delusion, that a nation, which had any pretension to politics and prudence, has ever yet been guilty of.’²¹

Enormous monarchies are, probably, destructive to human nature; in their progress, in their continuance, and even in their downfall, which can never be very distant from their establishment. The military genius, which aggrandized the monarchy, soon leaves the court, the capital, and the center of such a government; while the wars are carried on at a great distance, and interest so small a part of the state. The ancient nobility, whose affections attach them to their sovereign, live all at court; and never will accept of military

²⁰ J. Robertson, ‘Universal monarchy and the liberties of Europe: David Hume’s critique of a Whig doctrine’, *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, p. 355.

²¹ Hume, *Political Essays*, p. 159.

employments, which would carry them to remote and barbarous frontiers, where they are distant both from their pleasures and their fortune. The arms of the state, must, therefore, be entrusted to mercenary strangers, without zeal, without attachment, without honour; ready on every occasion to turn against the prince, and join each desperate malcontent, who offers pay and plunder. This is the necessary progress of human affairs: Thus human nature checks itself in its airy elevations: thus ambition blindly labours for the destruction of the conqueror, of his family, and of every thing near and dear to him. The BOURBONS, trusting to the support of their brave, faithful, and affectionate nobility, would push their advantage, without reserve or limitation. These, while fired with glory and emulation, can bear the fatigues and dangers of war; but never would submit to languish in the garrisons of HUNGARY or LITHUANIA, forgot at court, and sacrificed to the intrigues of every minion or mistress, who approaches the prince. The troops are filled with CRAVATES and TARTARS, HUSSARS and COSSACS; intermingled, perhaps, with a few soldiers of fortune from the better provinces: And the melancholy fate of the ROMAN emperors, from the same cause, is renewed over and over again, till the final dissolution of the monarchy.²²

John Pocock has described this passage as ‘an oddly oblique attempt to prophesy the fate of Rome for the states of modern Europe,’ yet it is far from clear that Hume intended such a reading.²³ For no enormous modern monarchy could rise, decline and fall of its own accord; the whole point was that the jealous ambition and emulation of the British would counter France long before it ever could. France, as a ‘pure monarchy’ further enjoyed the strategic advantage of the option of voluntary state bankruptcy, an option the moneyed interest in London would never allow.²⁴ It is worth noting that for Hume the term ‘enormous monarchy’ recognises no distinction between ‘state’ and ‘empire’, and is as applicable to the Roman empire as to modern Bourbon kingdoms of France or Spain. The somewhat imprecise formulation of ‘Bourbon’ suggested a unified Catholic front. Whether they were in league or potentially so due to family or to religion was left unstated.

Hume noted the paradox that while enthusiasm at first arrives with a thunderbolt and produces untold civil disorder, ‘after time it pacifies to a degree impossible where

²² *Political Essays*, p. 160.

²³ J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion III: The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge, 2003). p. 380.

²⁴ *Of Civil Liberty*, p. 57.

superstition reigns.²⁵ An absence of clerical institutions meant that Protestant nations lacked a class interested in maintaining and consolidating power over ceremonial. Without the agitation of such self-interested groups, the population became less heated and less factious in such matters:

Supersition, on the contrary, steals in gradually and insensibly; renders men tame and submissive; is acceptable to the magistrate, and seems inoffensive to the people: Till at last the priest, having firmly established his authority, becomes the tyrant and disturber of human society; by his endless contentions, persecutions, and religious wars. How smoothly did the ROMISH church advance in her acquisition of power? But into what dismal convulsions did she throw all EUROPE, in order to maintain it? On the other hand, our sectaries, who were formerly such dangerous bigots, are now become very free reasoners; and the *quakers* seem to approach nearly the only regular body of *deists* in the universe, the *literati*, or the disciples of CONFUCIUS in CHINA.²⁶

The pathology of superstition thus necessarily yielded a tyrannical political result. Yet Hume was not merely asserting the Whig commonplace that civil and religious liberty lived and died in symbiosis. For according to Hume's narrative the priest, not the centralising absolute monarch, became the tyrant. Hume seemed to be imagining a general *coup d'état* by the Jesuits over all Catholic Europe. Yet curiously it was at this point that Hume conjoined the general tyranny of ascendant priestcraft with the expansion of ancient Rome.²⁷ The empire of priestcraft seemed unavoidably an empire of expansion, a second Roman universal monarchy. It was the nature of this empire to snuff out liberty wherever she encountered it. Yet, as ever, Hume directed his discussion towards its relevance to the French 'tyranny', as his juxtaposition of the Jesuit and the Jansenist demonstrated:

The *molinists*, conducted by the *jesuits*, are great friends to superstition, rigid observers of external forms and ceremonies, and devoted to the

²⁵ 'Of Supersition and Enthusiasm', p. 48.

²⁶ 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', p. 49.

²⁷ 'What cruel tyrants were the ROMANS over the world during the time of their commonwealth!' – 'That Politics May be Reduced to a Science.'

authority of the priests, and to tradition. The *jansenist* are enthusiasts, and zealous promoters of the passionate devotion, and of the inward life; little influenced by authority; and, in a word, but half catholics. The consequences are exactly conformable to the foregoing reasoning. The *jesuits* are the tyrants of the people, and the slaves of the court: And the *jansenists* preserve alive the small sparks of love of liberty, which are to be found in the FRENCH nation.²⁸

Jesuits were not to be despised on narrow confessional grounds, as ‘priests of all religions are the same.’ The political danger of the Jesuitical strangle-hold on the French state lie in the menacing logic of priestcraft.

Clergymen, being drawn from the common mass of mankind, as people are to other employments, by the views of profit, the greatest part, though no atheists free-thinkers, will find it necessary, on particular occasion, to feign more devotion than they are, at that time, possessed of, and to maintain the appearance of fervor and seriousness, even when jaded with the exercises of their religion, or when they have their minds engaged in the common occupations of life. They must not, like the rest of the world, give scope to their natural movements and sentiments: They must set a guard over their looks and words and actions: And in order to support the veneration paid them by the ignorant vulgar, they must not only keep a remarkable reserve, but must promote the spirit of superstition, by a continued grimace and hypocrisy. This dissimulation often destroys the candor and ingenuity of their temper, and makes an irreparable breach in their character.²⁹

All priestcraft was founded in the basic lie of superior spiritual attributes, and the maintenance of this lie resulted in a severe truncation of moral life. Ambitious,³⁰ conceited,³¹ factious,³² intolerant³³ and vengeful,³⁴ the priest was the greatest danger any state could face:

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50

²⁹ ‘Of National Characters’ p. 80.

³⁰ ‘Most men are ambitious; but the ambition of other men may commonly be satisfied, by excelling in their particular profession, and thereby promoting the interests of society. The ambition of the clergy can often be satisfied only by promoting ignorance and superstition and implicit faith and pious frauds.’ *Ibid.*

³¹ ‘Most men have an overweening conceit of themselves; but *these* have a particular temptation to that vice, who are regarded with such veneration, and are even deemed sacred, by that multitude.’ *Ibid.*

³² ‘Most men are apt to bear a particular regard for members of their own profession; but as a lawyer, or a physician, or merchant, does, each of them, follow out his business apart, the interests of these professions are not so closely united as the interests of clergymen of the same religion; where the whole body gains by the veneration, paid to their common tenets, and by the suppression of antagonists’. *Ibid.*

³³ ‘Few men can bear contradiction with patience; but the clergy too often proceed even to a degree of fury on this head: Because all their credit and livelihood depend upon the belief, which their opinions meet with; and they alone pretend to a divine and supernatural authority, or have any colour for representing

Thus many vices of human nature, are, by fixed moral causes, inflamed in that profession; and though several individuals escape the contagion, yet all wise governments will be on their guard against the attempts of a society, who will for ever combine into one faction, and while it acts as a society, will for ever be actuated by ambition, pride, revenge, and a persecuting spirit.³⁵

The history of the menace of priestcraft was perhaps better explained by narrative than by analysis. The subject was a key theme of that part of *The History of England* devoted to foreign transactions, and not separable from that of the balance of power. The European dimension of Hume's *History* was no less present minded than its domestic constitutional aspect. No British discussion of the balance of power conducted in the middle of the eighteenth century could ignore the specific question of how Britain's diplomacy *vis à vis* France was best conducted, and no discussion of war in a new and disorienting age of credit could be about anything but the survival of the constitution itself.

Hume was traditional in viewing Queen Elizabeth as a model of prudent statecraft. By the time of her reign, the nature of England's confessional identity and her consequent role in Europe had largely been established. The two had been intimately linked, as 'religion was the capital point, on which depended all the political transactions of that age.' Prudence in an age of religious warfare had entailed discerning the correct relationship between protection of religion and true reason of state. It was rarely, if ever, prudent for a monarch to attempt to influence the course of religious controversies. Destruction of ecclesiastical unity and civil accord had been the result of the ill-conceived interventions of Henry VIII and his immediate successors Edward and Mary.

their antagonists as impious and prophane. The *Odium Theologicum*, or Theological Hatred, is noted even to a proverb, and means that degree of rancour, which is the most furious and implacable'. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

³⁴ Revenge is a natural passion to mankind; but seems to reign with the greatest force in priests and women: Because, being deprived of the immediate exertion of anger, in violence and combat, they are apt to fancy themselves despised on that account; and their pride supports their vindictive disposition.' *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The triumph of Elizabethan prudence against such an obstacle had been twofold; in an age where religious warfare nearly destroyed all bonds of European society, she had avoided civil foment through a moderate religious settlement, and just as crucially, she protected the viability of that settlement – and perhaps of English society itself – by avoiding entanglement in the religious wars of the continent. On the continent, in contrast, prudence had been in short supply. The European wars of religion, both within and between states, had destroyed the normal operations of the European balance.

Religion had become the primary reason of state:

The two great monarchies of the continent, France and Spain, being possessed of nearly equal force, were naturally antagonists; and England, from its power and situation, was intitled to support its own dignity, as well as tranquility, by holding the balance between them. Whatever incident, therefore, tended too much to depress one of these rival powers, as it left the other without controul, might be deemed contrary to the interests of England: Yet so much were these great maxims of policy over-ruled, during that age, by the disputes of theology, that Philip found an advantage in supporting the established government and religion of France; and Elizabeth in protecting faction and innovation.³⁶

The alignment of Europe was no longer constituted by great dynastic rivalries such as between Habsburg and Valois, and it had been a cardinal point of Elizabeth's political sagacity that she had understood the perilous implications of this:

Elizabeth was fully sensible of the dangerous situation, in which she now stood. In the massacre of Paris, she saw the result of that general conspiracy, formed for the extermination of the protestants; and she knew, that she herself, as the head and protectress of the new religion, was exposed to the utmost fury and resentment of the catholics. The violence and cruelty of the Spaniards in the Low Countries was another branch of the same conspiracy; and as Charles and Philip, two princes nearly allied in perfidy and bigotry, had now laid aside their pretended quarrel, and had avowed the most entire friendship, she had reason, as soon as they had appeased their domestic commotions, to dread the effects of their united counsels.³⁷

Hume's repeated invocations of conspiracy were not intended as irony. Later sniffing for Popish plots under every bed may well have been paranoid, but, for the moment, the

³⁶ David Hume, *The History of England*, vol. IV, p. 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 165.

combined forces of Counter-reformation Europe were indeed out to get her.³⁸

Hume obviously did not understand religious conflict entirely through the prism of international affairs. The centrepiece of his *History* was an interpretation of how in seventeenth-century Britain, religious conflict had in large part precipitated a civil war. Many of Hume's Whiggish readers had celebrated the struggle of the Huguenots as a noble lost cause, the failure of which paved the way for the ultimate success of French absolute monarchy. 'But the equal counterpoise of power, which, among foreign nations, is the source of tranquillity,' Hume insisted, 'proves always the ground of quarrel between domestic factions; and if the animosity of religion concur with the frequent occasions, which present themselves, of mutual injury, it is impossible, during any time, to preserve a firm concord in so delicate a situation.'³⁹ Balance may well have been important to liberty, but it could only ever complicate the regularity of government, and Hume was adamant that the rise of Protestant protest had been disastrous for the French polity. The conflict between Huguenot and Catholic in France had effectively dissolved the bonds of French society itself:

The people were divided into two theological factions, furious from their zeal, and mutually enraged from the injuries which they had committed or suffered; and as all faith had been violated and moderation banished, it seemed impracticable to find any terms of composition between them. Each party had devoted itself to its leaders, whose commands had more authority than the will of the sovereign; and even the catholics, to whom the king was attached, were entirely conducted by the counsels of Guise and his family. The religious connections had, on both sides, superseded the civil; or rather (for men will always be guided by present interest) two empires being secretly formed in the kingdom, every individual was engaged by new views of interest to follow those leaders, to whom, during the course of past convulsions, he had been indebted for his honours and preferment.⁴⁰

³⁸ J. G. A. Pocock's assertion that Hume was 'not much impressed by the threat of the Counter-Reformation' does not seem to be born out by Hume's text. *Barbarism and Religion II: Narratives of Civil Government*, (Cambridge, 1999) p. 235.

³⁹ Hume, *History of England*, vol. IV, pp. 55-56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 167-68.

There was an unresolved tension in Hume's analysis of France's 'intestine commotions'. On the one side, both factions had been motivated by a furious zeal which clouded the normal operations of the understanding and dissolved sympathetic fellow feeling, leaving nothing but blind rage at the opposing faction. The sociable preconditions of trust and good faith necessary for regular government had entirely collapsed under the weight of that rage. Hume's prose never leapt off the page more strikingly than when portraying such a pathological breakdown of society itself, yet here the painter and the analyst of the effect of religion on politics came at loggerheads. There had been something more than zeal at work, namely a new and frightening form of priestcraft. The members of the Society of Jesus, those modern foot soldiers of the Roman church militant, had hovered semi-concealed within European corridors of power and learning, corrupting reason and reason of state in equal measure:

These seminaries were all of them under the direction of the jesuits, a new order of regular priests erected in Europe, when the court of Rome perceived, that the lazy monks and beggarly friars, who sufficed in times of ignorance, were no longer able to defend the ramparts of the church, assailed on every side, and that the inquisitive spirit of the age required a society more active and more learned, to oppose its dangerous progress. These men, as they stood foremost in the contest against the protestants, drew on them animosity of that whole sect; and by assuming a superiority over the other more numerous and more ancient orders of their own communion, were even exposed to the envy of their brethren: So that it is no wonder, if the blame, to which their principles and conduct might be exposed, has, in many instances, been much exaggerated. This reproach, however, they must bear from posterity, that, by the very nature of their institution, they were engaged to pervert learning, the only effectual remedy against superstition, into a nourishment of that infirmity; and as their erudition was chiefly of the ecclesiastical and scholastic kind (though a few members have cultivated polite literature), they were only the more enabled, by that acquisition, to refine away the plainest dictates of morality, and to erect a regular system of casuistry, by which prevarication, perjury, and every crime, when it served their ghostly purposes, might be justified and defended.⁴¹

Whatever the precise nature of the dialectic of zeal and cynicism underlying the resurgence of political Catholicism, it had been the defining dynamic with which

⁴¹*Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 188.

Elizabeth need contend. She had seized the opportunity provided by temporary French impotence to play a much more active and intrusive role in the affairs of Scotland than would otherwise have been possible. But she had well understood the effective limits of her reach, and nowhere had this been better observed than in her handling of the set of opportunities provided by Europe's other great war of religion, the independence struggle of iconoclastic Dutch Calvinists against the inquisitorial armies of Phillip II's Spain.

Heavily drawing on Hugo Grotius' Tacitean narrative, *Annales et Historie des Rebus Belgis*, Hume made no attempt to downplay Alva's war crimes and sundry atrocities through philosophically minded distancing. English opinion would have supported holy war of any duration in defence of the Dutch faithful. The Dutch themselves were well aware of this, and saw Elizabeth as their natural protector, going so far as to offer her the Crown of a newly united Netherlands in return for military support. It would have been an immense balm to her sense of vanity to accept such an offer. But Elizabeth was not to be tied down militarily any more than she was romantically. To have accepted would have drawn England into potentially endless protracted war against the combined forces of Spain and France. She had dispatched Leicester, but had refused the Dutch crown and had remained personally aloof from the progress of Dutch affairs.

Hume emphasised Elizabethan prudence in foreign affairs had been largely emulated by James, whose generally pacific view of England's role in Europe Hume was at pains to applaud. The historian presented the argument for English intervention in the Thirty Years War as motivated purely by religious enthusiasm. In an analysis of the contemporary European balance no committed Protestant could have accepted, Hume maintained that the fate of the unfortunate but distant 'Winter Queen' had no particular

relevance to the security of the Elizabethan Settlement. The clear lesson was that protection of the religious liberties of Europe had not been a sufficient ground for military action. Clamours for 'liberal intervention' voiced by zealous enthusiasts had been antithetical with national interest correctly understood:

High were now the murmurs and complaints against the King's neutrality and unactive-disposition. The happiness and tranquility of their own country became distasteful to the English, when they reflected on the oppressions and distresses of their protestant brethren in Germany. They considered not, that their interposal in the wars of the continent, tho' agreeable to religious zeal, could not, at that time, be justified by any sound maxims of politics; that, however exorbitant the Austrian greatness, the danger was still too distant to give any just alarms to England; that mighty resistance would yet be made by so many potent and warlike nations in Germany, 'ere they would yield their neck to the yoke; that France, now engaged by bigotry to contract a double alliance with the Austrian family, must necessarily be soon roused from her lethargy, and oppose the progress of so hated a rival; that in the farther advance of conquests, even the interest of the two branches of that ambitious family must interfere, and engender mutual jealousy and opposition; that a land-war, carried on at such a distance, would waste the blood and treasure of the English nation, without any hopes of success; that a sea-war, indeed, might be both safe and successful against Spain, but would not affect the enemy in such vital parts as to make them stop their career of success in Germany, and abandon all their acquisitions; and that the prospect of recovering the Palatinate being at present desperate, the affair was reduced to this simple question, whether peace and commerce with Spain, or the uncertain hopes of plunder and of conquests in the Indies were preferable; a question, which, at the beginning of the King's reign, had already been decided, and perhaps with reason, in favor of the former advantages.⁴²

James had in essence acted prudently, despite the opposition of loud Protestant voices within Parliament. Opinion was capable of erring in the opposite direction, and allowing religious considerations to minimise the perception of a threat to more genuine interests, such as trade and commerce. Such was the case during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the high water mark of Dutch aggressive imperialism. Hume emphasised that it was remarkable that the English body politic had been so little alarmed by the increasingly belligerent attitude of the Dutch toward maintaining a favourable balance of trade.⁴³

⁴² D. Hume, *The History of Great Britain*, ed. Duncan Forbes, pp 167-8.

⁴³ *History of Great Britain*, pp. 241-2

The question of the prudence of intervention versus non-intervention grew far more serious at the end of the seventeenth century as England engaged in a second Dutch war, prompting from Hume a change of tack. This period had witnessed the rise of Colbert's France, a ferociously aggressive state, whose traditional aim of territorial aggrandisement had been rendered far more practicable through a potent symbiosis of Catholic bigotry and far reaching economic reforms. A regular and efficient monarchy had successfully emulated the commercial practices of the Dutch and the English and had become truly formidable. The collapse of Spain brought about by a collapsed imperial economy and a failed aggressive policy towards the Dutch, had left Louis XIV with only one potential counterweight, England herself:

The animosity, which had anciently subsisted between the English and French nations, and which had been suspended for above a century by the jealousy of Spanish greatness, began to revive and exert itself. The glory of preserving the balance of Europe, a glory so much founded on justice and humanity, flattered the ambition of England; and the people were eager to provide for their own future security, by opposing the progress of so hated a rival. The prospect of embracing such measures had contributed, among other reasons, to render the peace of Breda so universally acceptable to the nation. By the death of Philip IV. King of Spain, an inviting opportunity, and some very slender pretences, had been afforded to call forth the ambition of Lewis.⁴⁴

Yet due to a long history of prudential wariness on the part of English monarchs of engagement on the continent, the only resistance to France, despite the sentiments of the English people, had remained the House of Orange. In a telling comparison between the military capabilities of the two nations, Hume underscored how the Dutch, in and of themselves, were in no condition to maintain such a lofty, if futile role. Seventeenth century France was a curiously yet dangerously potent hybrid phenomena, where ancient ambitions, modern finance, and manners in a state of transition all combined to pose perhaps the most formidable threat to the independency of Europe.

⁴⁴ D. Hume, *The History of England*, vol. VI, pp. 216-17.

The order, economy, and industry of Colbert, equally subservient to the ambition of the prince and happiness of the people, furnished unexhausted treasures: These, employed by the unrelenting vigilance of Louvois, supplied every military preparation, and facilitated all the enterprizes of the army: Condé, Turenne, seconded by Luxembourg, Crequi, and the most renowned generals of the age, conducted this army, and by their conduct and reputation inspired courage into every one. The monarch himself, surrounded with a brave nobility, animated his troops by the prospect of reward, or, what was more valued, by the hopes of his approbation. The fatigues of war gave no interruption to gaiety: Its dangers furnished matter for glory: And in no enterprize did the genius of that gallant and polite people ever break out with more distinguished lustre.⁴⁵

The frugal, sober, and industrious Dutch had never been likely to prove a match against such an unprecedented Leviathan. Aristocratic government and commercial manners had combined to soften the Dutch martial spirit, rendering them radically less able to provide for their own defence than they had been a mere generation before.⁴⁶

At this point Hume adopted the Whig critique of the negligence of Charles II in guarding against French aggrandisement and contempt for the European balance without qualification. He may have had tactical reasons for doing so, as he would later need to present the statecraft of William III as instrumental in securing the liberties of Europe. Charles, however, had thrown the weight of England behind the French. A measure of the imprudence of Charles' plan of war against the Dutch was the fact that popular sentiment among the English troops was simply never aroused against their fellow Protestants, the Dutch. The English nation would have fought against their allies the French with considerably more enthusiasm.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 257.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 258.

⁴⁷ 'It is indeed remarkable, that, during this war, though the English with their allies much over-matched the Hollanders, they were not able to gain any advantage over them; while in the former war, though often overborne by numbers, they still exerted themselves with the greatest courage, and always acquired great renown, sometimes even signal victories. But they were disgusted at the present measures, which they deemed pernicious to their country; they were not satisfied in the justice of the quarrel; and they entertained a perpetual jealousy of their confederates, whom, had they been permitted, they would, with more pleasure, have destroyed than even the enemy themselves.' *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 278.

The most testing trial of the prudence of intervention had occurred in the context of the War of the Grand Alliance against the resurgent France of Louis XIV. Charles, a poor student of the European scene, had vacillated imprudently, never entirely able to determine whether his personal interests lie with Louis or against him:

It is worthy of observation, that, during this period, the king was, by every one, abroad and at home, by France and by the allies, allowed to be the undisputed arbiter of Europe, and no terms of peace, which he would have prescribed, could have been refused by either party. Though France afterwards found means to resist the same alliance, joined with England; yet was she then obliged to make such violent efforts as quite exhausted her; and it was the utmost necessity, which pushed her to find resources, far surpassing her own expectations. Charles was sensible, that, so long as the war continued abroad, he should never enjoy ease at home, from the impatience and importunity of his subjects; yet could he not resolve to impose a peace by openly joining himself with either party. Terms advantageous to the allies must lose him the friendship of France: The contrary would enrage his parliament. Between these views, he perpetually fluctuated; and from his conduct, it is observable, that a careless, remiss disposition, agitated by opposite motives, is capable of as great inconsistencies as are incident even to the greatest imbecillity and folly.⁴⁸

At one level the above passage can be read as a moralist presenting an object lesson in the dangers of inconstancy. Yet Charles had failed politically as decisively as he had morally; he had crucially failed to spot and seize his opportunity. Imprudence in foreign transactions, in the context of an unstable constitutional arrangement had been bound to have effects on England's internal balance of power between crown and parliament. A key effect of his vacillation was the distrust of the commons. Hume firmly emphasised that Charles' fateful moment of decision had constituted a moment of truth in the history of English foreign policy, and just as firmly emphasised that it was the key failure of the monarch's reign not to have appreciated this:

It is certain, that this was the critical moment, when the king both might with ease have preserved the balance of power in Europe, which it has since cost this island a great expense of blood and treasure to restore, and might by perseverance have at last regained, in some tolerable measure, after all

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 303.

past errors, the confidence of his people. This opportunity being neglected, the wound became incurable; and notwithstanding his momentary inclinations to rely on his faith: he was still believed to be at bottom engaged in the same interests, and they soon relapsed into distrust and jealousy.⁴⁹

At this point the history of domestic and foreign policy fatally collided. Charles had by now become so distrusted by Parliament, he could not act as he wished to do. But the window of opportunity was gone in any case. Hume was keen to emphasise that Louis had now reached his apotheosis; at which the entirety of the European stage was his to command. Perhaps at no point since Charlemagne had the prospect of universal monarchy been so credible:

Lewis had now reached the height of that glory, which ambition can afford. His ministers and negotiators appeared as much superior to those of all Europe in the cabinet, as his generals and armies had been experienced in the field. A successful war had been carried on against an alliance, composed of the greatest potentates in Europe. Considerable conquests had been made, and his territories enlarged on every side. An advantageous peace was at last concluded, where he had given the law. The allies were so enraged against each other that they were not likely to cement soon any new confederacy. And thus he had, during some years, a real prospect of attaining the monarchy of Europe, and of exceeding the empire of Charlemagne, perhaps of equalling the that of ancient Rome. Had England continued much longer in the same condition, and under the same government, it is not easy to conceive, that he could have failed of his purpose.⁵⁰

Waxing French power naturally aroused the resentment of her neighbours. English opinion was doubly enraged, first out of jealousy, and second at the realisation that English policy was that of a slavish subservience to a potential universal tyrant. Domestic opinion was apoplectic, and for once, Hume sided firmly with the population against the crown.⁵¹

Charles II's reign had essentially been a failure, a series of fatefully missed opportunities. A new monarch, as ever, brought the hope of a renewal of prudent policy towards France. The populace had hoped that James II would correct the errors of his

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 308.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 320.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 301-2.

brother, and judiciously act to maintain the balance of Europe.⁵² This had not been the way things had worked out; James found that he required the active assistance of the French in pursuit of his religious policies. James' religious policy had been little short of a violent assault on the delicately and precariously balanced Elizabethan compromise. He had promoted the most imprudent levels of toleration for Roman Catholics,⁵³ and then had allowed their placement in Ireland, effectively wrecking the salutary policies of his father and grandfather.⁵⁴ The timing of such imprudence could not have been worse. Louis XIV had recently revoked the edict of Nantes, ending the era of prudently *politique* toleration in France. The Revocation and subsequent mass expulsion of the Huguenots had been an act of immediate and universal significance, a shocking and

⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 451.

⁵³ 'James, more imprudent and arbitrary than his predecessor, issued his proclamation, suspending all the penal laws in ecclesiastical affairs, and granting a general liberty of conscience to all his subjects. He was not deterred by the reflection, both that this scheme of indulgence was already blasted by two fruitless attempts; and that in such a government as that of England, it was not sufficient that a prerogative be approved by some lawyers and antiquaries: If it was condemned by the general voice of the nation, and yet was still exerted, the victory over national liberty was no less signal than if obtained by the most flagrant injustice and usurpation. These two considerations indeed would rather serve to recommend this project to James; who deemed himself superior in vigour and activity to his brother, and who probably thought, that his people enjoyed no liberties, but by his royal concession and indulgence.' *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 482.

⁵⁴ 'But what afforded the most alarming prospect, was the continuance and even encrease of the violent and precipitate conduct of affairs in Ireland. Tyrconnel was now vested with full authority; and carried over with him as chancellor one Fitton, a man who was taken from a jail, and who had been convicted of forgery and other crimes, but who compensated for all his enormities by a headlong zeal for the catholic religion. . . . The catholics were put in possession of the council of table, of the courts of judicature, and of the benches of justices. In order to make them masters of Parliament, the same violence was exercised that had been practised in England. The charters of Dublin and of all the corporations were annulled; and the new charters were granted, subjecting the corporations to the will of the sovereign. The protestant freemen were expelled, catholics introduced; and the latter sect, as they always were the majority in number, were now invested with the whole power of the kingdom. The act of settlement was the only obstacle to their enjoying the whole property; and Tyrconnel had formed a scheme for calling a parliament, in order to reverse that act, and empower the king to bestow all the lands of Ireland on his catholic subjects. But in this scheme he met with opposition from the moderate catholics in the king's council. Lord Bellasis went even so far as to affirm with an oath, "that that fellow in Ireland was fool and madman enough to ruin ten kingdoms." The decay of trade, from the desertion of the protestants, was represented; the sinking of the revenue; the alarm communicated to England: And by these considerations the king's resolutions were for some time suspended; though it was easy to foresee, from the usual tenor of his conduct, which side would at last preponderate.' *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 484-5.

tragic event in sacred history for Protestants of all stripes. The theological temperature of political opinion in England, already dangerously high, had now risen to a fever pitch:

Lewis XIV. Having long harrassed and molested the protestants, at last revoked entirely the edict of Nantz; which had been enacted by Harry IV. for securing them the free exercise of their religion; which had been declared irrevocable; and which during the experience of near a century, had been attended with no sensible inconvenience. All the iniquities, inseparable from persecution, were exercised against those unhappy religionists; who became obstinate in proportion to the oppressions which they suffered, and either covered under a feigned conversion a more violent abhorrence of the catholic communion, or sought among foreign nations for that liberty, of which they were bereaved in their native country. Above half a million of the most useful and industrious subjects deserted France; and exported, together with immense sums of money, those arts and manufactures, which had chiefly tended to enrich that kingdom. They propagated every where the most tragical accounts of the tyranny, exercised against them, and revived among the protestants all that resentment against the bloody and persecuting spirit of popery, to which so many incidents in all ages had given too much foundation. Nearly fifty thousand refugees passed over into England; and all men were disposed, from their representations, to entertain the utmost horror against the projects, which they apprehended to be formed by the king for the abolition of the protestant religion. When a prince of so much humanity and of such signal prudence as Lewis could be engaged, by the bigotry of his religion alone, without any provocation, to embrace such sanguinary and impolitic measures; what might be dreaded, they asked, from James, who was so much inferior in these virtues, and who had already been irritated by such obstinate and violent opposition? In vain did the king affect to throw the highest blame on the persecutions in France: In vain did he afford the most real protection and assistance to the distressed Huguenots. All these symptoms of toleration were regarded as insidious; opposite to the avowed principles of his sect, and belied by the severe administration, which he himself had exercised against the nonconformists in Scotland.⁵⁵

Hume was keen to ratchet up the tension in driving home the importance of English policy towards France at this juncture for all of Europe. The general agitation in Europe had been greater than that occasioned by the rise of Charles V himself, while in the meantime English policy had still vacillated. Louis' act had been imprudent in the extreme; in a fit of bigoted rage he sowed the seeds of his own demise. In much the same way as Robertson was to argue that the overreach of Charles V had made the opposition of Maurice of Saxony possible, Louis' ambition and bigotry created his own nemesis in the form of William of Orange:

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 470-471.

No characters are more incompatible than those of a conqueror and a persecutor; and Lewis soon found, that besides his weakening France by the banishment of so many useful subjects, the refugees had enflamed all the protestant nations against him, and had raised him enemies, who, in defence of their religion as well as liberty, were obstinately resolved to oppose his progress. The city of Amsterdam and other towns in Holland, which had before fallen into a dependence on France, being terrified with the accounts, which they every moment received, of the furious persecutions against the Huguenots, had now dropped all domestic faction, and had entered into an entire confidence with the prince of Orange. The protestant princes of the empire formed a separate league at Magdebourg for the defence of their religion. The English were anew enraged at the blind bigotry of their sovereign and were disposed to embrace the most desperate resolutions against him. From a view of the state of Europe during this period, it appears, that Lewis, besides sullyng an illustrious reign, had wantonly by his persecution raised invincible barriers to his arms, which otherwise it had been difficult, if not impossible, to resist.

William had at that time ‘formed a project of uniting Europe in one general league against the encroachments of France, which seemed so nearly to threaten the independence of all its neighbours.’⁵⁶ At that point English Whigs offered William the most effective means of accomplishing his task, the English crown, and consequent arms and revenue. Hume’s narrative of the events of the Revolution has been dealt with extensively elsewhere, and there is no need to rehearse that discussion here.⁵⁷ It is enough to note the panegyrical tone of Hume’s description of William’s exalted place in the history of modern European liberty:

The prince of Orange, throughout his whole life, was peculiarly happy in the situations, in which he was placed. He saved his own country from ruin, he restored the liberties of these kingdoms, he supported the general independency of Europe. And thus, though his virtue, it is confessed, be not the purest, which we meet with in history, it will be difficult to find any person, whose actions and conduct have contributed more eminently to the general interests of society and of mankind.⁵⁸

We are, ironically, not far here from Robertsonian language at its most providential. No figure in European history was more driven by prudent regard for the European balance.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 498.

⁵⁷ N. Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 1989) pp. 105-107.

⁵⁸ *History of England*, vol. VI, p. 504.

William, a cunning pragmatist in his dealing with the English Whigs, nonetheless had a certain visionary quality, as one who comprehended and was thus able to navigate the dynamics of a state system that yearned for corrective balancing. Hume's narrative terminated with the Revolution Settlement. It did not, therefore take him as far as the subsequent wars William's invasion had been designed to facilitate. Such a narrative would have entailed accounting for the revolution in war finance occasioned by Britain's complete absorption into a 'continental' policy, and would no doubt have raised profoundly troubling questions concerning the true nature of the Williamite legacy. The *History*, however, did not end with such dark matters. The parallel failure of James and triumph of William instead illustrated the true lesson of late seventeenth-century power politics: deal prudently with the balance of power or the balance of power will deal prudently with you.

This was a maxim of prudence to which Robertson might well have warmed, if with qualification. The implication of Hume's narration of the history of the balance of power was that it alone was the best defence against the triumph of priestcraft over prudent politics. In defence of modern prudence in foreign affairs, Hume was perfectly prepared to stoke up, or, as Robertson would have viewed it, imprudently exaggerate, both the degree of dangerous, unbridled zeal and of its cynical manipulation by a corrupt, self interested order as a factor in international politics.

The balance of power was not the only Robertsonian theme pursued by Hume in his *History*. He was also, if rather more tangentially, concerned with the offensive behaviour of Britain as an enormous monarchy. A key point in question was the vexed issue of the status of Ireland as an English *dominium* and within the English *imperium*.

Modern scholarship has emphasised the extent to which Hume's text reflected the sharply confessional orientation of his sources, such as Sir John Davies, Sir John Temple, and to a lesser extent, Lord Clarendon.⁵⁹ This is not to say that Hume's understanding of England's civilising mission in Ireland lacked an idealistic component:

The great plan of James, in the administration of Ireland, continued by Charles, was, by justice and peace, to reconcile that turbulent people to the authority of laws, and introducing art and industry among them, to cure that sloth and barbarism to which they had ever been subject. In order to serve both these purposes, and at the same time, secure the dominion of Ireland to the English crown, great colonies of British had been carried over, and, being intermixed with the Irish, had every where introduced a new face of things into that country. During a peace of near forty years, the inveterate quarrels betwixt the nations seemed, in a great measure, obliterated; and tho' much of the landed property, forfeited by rebellion, had been conferred on the new planters, a more that equal return had been made, by their instructing the natives in tillage, building, manufactures, and all the civilized arts of life. This had been the course of things during the successive administrations of Chichester, Grandison, Falkland, and, above all, of Strafford. Under the government of this last Nobleman, the pacific plans, now come to greater maturity, and forwarded by his vigour and industry, seemed to have operated with full success, and to have bestowed, at last, on that savage country, the face of an European settlement.⁶⁰

This was Whig gloss on the neo-Roman apologetic for empire as a civilising force at its most naked. *Imperium* had justified itself through the improvement it provided, uprooting discord and planting civility, and Hume displayed no inclination to place the 'plantation metaphor' under the microscope.⁶¹ He was the painter of the English *dominium* over Ireland as much as its analyst. In Hume's view, Irish insurrection had more than justified subsequent rounds of land seizures. Of course, there might have been a tactical dimension to Hume's portrait. If the English *imperium* over Ireland had been tyrannical rather than largely beneficent, the later rebellion might have proven less contrary to all reason and morality. The Irish natives had had cause for gratitude, but their pretended acquiescence to British lordship proved in fact a sort of national

⁵⁹ J. Hill, 'Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: the Disputed lessons of Irish History 1690-1812' in *Past and Present* 118 (Feb 1988), p. 111; Paul B. Smith, 'Conjecture, Acquiescence, and John Millar's History of Ireland' *The European Legacy*, 1 (1996), p. 2231.

⁶⁰ D. Hume, *History of Great Britain*, p. 452.

⁶¹ D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000) pp. 24-60.

dissimulation. Hume did not find this surprising, remarking that the better part of the island remained in thrall to priestcraft. The Irish Catholics had been accorded a de facto toleration, but their priests had been determined to foment unrest. 'So long as the churches and the ecclesiastical revenues were kept from the priests, and they were obliged to endure the neighborhood of profane heretics, being themselves discontented,' Hume explained, 'they endeavored continually to retard any cordial reconciliation betwixt the English and the Irish nations'.⁶²

After rapacity had fully exerted itself, cruelty, and the most barbarous, that ever, in any nation, was known or heard of, began its operations. An universal massacre commenced of the English, now defenceless and passively resigned to their inhuman foes. No age, no sex, no condition, was spared. The wife, weeping for her butchered husband, and embracing her helpless children, was pierced along with them, and perished by the same stroke. The old, the young, the vigorous, the infirm, underwent a like fate, and were confounded in one common ruin. In vain did flight save from the first assault: Destruction was, every where, let loose, and met the hunted victims at every turn. In vain was recourse had to relations, to companions, to friends: All connexions were dissolved, and death was dealt by that inhuman hand, from which protection was implored and expected. Without provocation, without opposition, the astonished English, living in profound peace and full security, were massacred by their nearest neighbours, with whom they had long upheld a continued intercourse of kindness and good offices.

The improving British had originally fought here to conquer, the wild Irishman now, to destroy. But it was a destructive wildness underscored with the deepest cynicism.

Amidst all these enormities, the sacred name of RELIGION resounded on every side; not to stop the hand of these inhuman savages, but to enforce their blows, and to steel their heart against every movement of human or social sympathy. The English, as heretics, abhorred of God, and detestable to all holy men, were marked out by the priests for slaughter; and, of all actions, to rid the world of these declared enemies to catholic faith and piety, was represented as the most meritorious. Nature, which, in that rude people, was sufficiently inclined to atrocious deeds, was farther stimulated by precept; and national prejudices empoisoned by those aversions, more deadly and incurable, which arose from an enraged superstition. While death finished the sufferings of each victim, the bigotted assassins, with joy and exultation, still echoed in his expiring ears, that these agonies were but the commencement of torments, infinite and eternal. . . . An event, memorable in the annals of human kind, and worthy to be held in

⁶² *History of Great Britain*, p. 455.

perpetual detestation and abhorrence.⁶³

The massacre, along with its ensuing repercussions, had proven a disaster above all for the native Irish. Irish savagery had entirely prevented the subordination necessary for military discipline. The manner of savage warfare discounted for Hume any possibility that any jealous defence of their liberties had motivated the Irish:

So great is the ascendant, which, from a long course of successes, the English has acquired over the Irish nation, that tho' the latter, when they receive military discipline among foreigners, are not surpassed by any European people, they have never, in their own country, been able to make any vigorous effort for the defence or recovery of their liberties. In many encounters, the English, under Lord More, Sir William St Leger, Sir Frederic Hamilton, and others, with great disadvantage of situation and numbers, had put the Irish to rout, and returned in triumph to Dublin. The siege of Tredah, the rebels raised, after an obstinate defence made by the garrison. Ormond had obtained two compleat victories, at Kilrush and Ross; and had brought relief to all the forts, which were besieged or blockaded in different parts of the kingdom. But not withstanding all these successes, even the most common necessities of life were wanting to the victorious armies. The Irish, in their wild rage against the British planters, had laid waste the whole kingdom, and were themselves totally unfit, from their barbarous sloth and ignorance, to raise any convenience of human life. During the course of six months, no supplies had come in from England; except the fourth part of one small vessel's lading. Dublin, to save itself from starving, had been obliged to send the greatest part of its inhabitants to England. The army had little ammunition, scarce exceeding 40 barrels of powder; not even shoes or cloaths; and for want of food, the cavalry had been obliged to eat their own horses. And tho' the distresses of the Irish were not much inferior; beside that they were more hardened against such extremities, it was but a melancholy prospect, that the two nations, while they continued their furious animosities, should make desolate that fertile island, which might serve to the subsistence and happiness of both.⁶⁴

We have seen Hume, in his discussion of English transactions in Ireland, defend a Protestant argument for English *imperium* wholly traditional in character. The question remains whether the Irish case was exceptional in Hume's thought, or accorded with a more general understanding of the potential benefits of empire. Could one crudely transpose the sceptical North Briton's arguments *vis à vis* Ireland to the remainder of

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

British maritime holdings? At first it would seem otherwise. In marked contradistinction to his Jacobean plantation rhetoric *vis à vis* Ireland, Hume gave short shrift to the jaded jurisprudence of bloody conquest and naked piracy that constituted European legal pretensions to the New World:

When the courage and avarice of the Spaniards and Portuguese had discovered so many new worlds, they were resolved to shew themselves superior to the barbarous heathens, whom they invaded, not only in arts and arms, but also in the justice of the quarrel: They applied to Alexander VI who then filled the papal chair; and he generously bestowed on the Spaniards the whole western, and on the Portuguese the whole eastern part of the globe. The more scrupulous protestants, who acknowledged not the authority of the Roman pontiff, established the first discovery as the foundation of *their* title; and if a pyrate or sea-adventurer of their nation had but erected a stick or stone on the shore, as a memorial of his taking possession, they concluded the whole continent to belong to them, and thought themselves intited to expel or exterminate, as usurpers, the antient possessors and inhabitants. It was in this manner, that Sir Walter Raleigh, about twenty-three years before, had acquired to the crown of England a just claim to the continent of Guiana, a region as large as the half of Europe; and tho' that the English title remained certain and indefeazable. But it had happened in the mean time, that the Spaniards, not knowing or not acknowledging the claim, had taken possession of a small part of Guiana, had formed a settlement on the river Oronooko, had built a little town called St Thomas, and were there working some mines of small value.⁶⁵

By linking what his readers would no doubt have viewed as the ludicrous *translatio* of the New World from the papacy to Spain and Portugal with the more respectable claim of first possession, Hume completely undercut any notion of noble origins of the empire 'protestant, maritime, commercial, and free.' The passage would have further rankled patriotic readers by underlining confessional difference while denying such difference any salutary effect. Extermination would seem for Hume a thoroughly ecumenical pursuit. This was not as devastating an indictment as might first appear, however. Most *imperium* began with violence, and it was no doubt anachronistic to expect any different from an age so lacking in politeness and correct notions of commerce. What that passage did not prefigure was the rather jarringly sentimental view to which Hume could occasionally give voice. As has been noted, Hume was at pains to demonstrate the

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 165-66.

prudence of James I's largely pacific foreign policy. He prudently moderated the religious passions of the people away from involvement in the Thirty Years War, and through his Irish plantations, adopted the best-calculated strategy for inculcating industry and civility among that 'savage' people. The chief glory of the Jacobean age, however, was the establishing of colonies along the Atlantic seaboard on correct, even 'noble' principles. The three developments were linked. Only by denying them a great continental war could James direct the creative energies of the population toward more distant prospects of *grandezza*. 'When peace put an end to the war-like enterprizes against Spain', explained Hume, 'and left ambitious spirits no hopes of making any longer such rapid advances towards honor and fortune, the nation began to second the pacific intentions of its monarch, and to seek a surer, tho' slower expedient, for acquiring riches and glory.'⁶⁶ Here Hume lapsed back into the traditional contrast between the sloth of the Spanish and the industry of the English, allowing Hume to rehearse his qualified understanding of English exceptionalism:

What chiefly renders the reign of James memorable, is the commencement of the English colonies in America; colonies established on the noblest footing, that has been known in any age or nation. The Spaniards, being the first discoverers of the new world, immediately took possession of the precious mines, which they found there; and, by the allurements of great riches, they were tempted to depopulate their own country as well as that which they conquered; and added the vice of sloth to those of avarice and barbarity, which had attended their adventures in those renowned enterprises. That fine coast was entirely neglected, which reaches from St Augustine to Cape Breton, and which lies in all the temperate climates, is watered by noble rivers, and offers a fertile soil, but nothing more, to the industrious planter. People gradually flock from England by the necessitous and indigent, who, at home, increased neither wealth nor populousness, the colonies, which were planted along that tract, have promoted the navigation, encouraged the industry, and even multiplied the inhabitants of their mother-country. The spirit of independency, which was reviving in England, here shone forth in its full lustre, and received new accession of force from the aspiring character of those, who, being discontented with the established church and monarchy, had fought for freedom amid those savage deserts. The seeds of many a noble state have been sown in climates, kept desolate by the wild manners of the antient inhabitants; and an asylum secured, in that solitary world, for liberty and science, if ever

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 244.

the spreading of unlimited empire, or the inroad of barbarous nations, should again extinguish them in this turbulent and restless hemisphere.

Here surely was Humean historical irony at its most acute. The Spanish, at the height of their bigoted, persecuting *imperium*, had brought about their own decline through a fundamental misunderstanding of how correctly to procure national wealth. They pumped the mother country full of useless specie, and fatally neglected agriculture and those regions most conducive to it. To whom then does the philosopher direct the attention of the reading public for a more exemplary performance and more laudable results? To fanatical enthusiasts and other such rabble, who had been thoroughly useless, if not downright destructive at home, but had produced the most marvellous improvements in far-flung lands. These virtuous improvers had already created something not far from an isolated utopia, a haven from any universal monarchy or violent conquest. In America, Hume had found a balm for his pessimism.

Hume provided little in the end by way of a critique of the English *imperium*; his text dismissed the fear that the metropole might prove incapable of maintaining order over the colonies. In short, the Jacobean legacy was both preservable and well worth preserving:

Speculative reasoners during that age, raised many objections to the planting those remote colonies; and foretold, that, after draining their mother-country of inhabitants, they would soon shake off her yoke, and erect an independent government in America: But time has shown, that the views, entertained by those who encouraged such generous undertakings, were more just and solid. A mild government and great naval force have preserved, and may long preserve the dominion of England over her colonies. And such advantage have commerce and navigation reaped from these establishments, that more than half of the English shipping is at present computed to be employed in carrying on the traffic with the American settlements.⁶⁷

Hume was not merely celebrating, although he certainly did, the colonial enterprise as beneficial to English commerce. He was actively celebrating the colonies as invaluable

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

English possessions, without any hint that they could or should exist independently of the metropole. To say so in 1754 was, of course, entirely unexceptionable; it was a passage 'that wicked madman Pitt' could have written himself.⁶⁸ This passage, intriguingly, was allowed to remain unaltered from the first edition as late as his final revised edition, published posthumously in 1779. By this time we know, thanks to correspondence between Hume and his publisher, that the historian no longer held such views. He felt that the job of policing the American colonies was a lost cause many times over, whose attempt could only throw the present ministry into even greater disrepute than it was in already. Hume's ironic position was that the urgent need to preserve authority at home required a radical concession of liberty across the Atlantic. Yet the passage remained. It was not that Hume was ever a reluctant self-editor. He made much, in letters to Strahan of retooling the text at length, casting to the flames as sophistry and illusion all passages revealing latent vulgar Whig prejudices. Such self-revisionism, however, was largely confined to domestic constitutional matters, and seldom occasioned any substantial alteration of his narrative of foreign transactions. It cannot credibly be maintained that Hume had refrained from adjusting his text out of fear of offending his readers. An author, or indeed a publisher, with such scruples would scarcely have presented such a work to the public in the first instance. In any case it was the general effect of Hume's later alterations to render his text *more* offensive to his readers. The issue here is not to challenge received wisdom concerning the unique brand of anti-imperialism of Hume's twilight years, but to point out the curiously sharp disconnection between Hume's own later opinions and those expressed in his literary *magnum opus*. David Hume may well have concluded an 'American in his principles'. His *History of England*, however, did

⁶⁸ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford, 1969) II, 300-01.

not.

We do not know if Hume and Robertson ever discussed the American problem, or the Jesuits, or the European balance of power, or any number of questions common to the historiography of the two. What can be said is that, if Robertson were aware of his views on the matter, such knowledge in no ways altered his own views. While the view of English empire advanced in Hume's *History* and that in Robertson's own narratives were far more closely aligned than has been supposed, Hume's historiography of prudence and priestcraft remained suggestive yet ultimately unacceptable to the Presbyterian minister. Hume had provided the European states system and its guiding motive, the balance of power, with the most sophisticated and philosophical history it had yet received. But that history remained one of the carcinogenic nature of all priestcraft on politics, and hence, a history unremittingly and fundamentally hostile to the institutions of all revealed religion. Robertson, the foremost ecclesiastical politician of his generation, with a highly developed understanding of the *arcana imperii* based on personal experience, would have found such a narrative highly unsatisfactory, if not personally insulting. Yet Hume had correctly identified many of the questions upon which enlightened British policy should be based, and an enlightened British *imperium* pursued. The history of the balance of power and of imperial expansion in an age of commerce and religion urgently needed rewriting.

Chapter Three: Robertson's Scottish Contexts

The previous chapter sought to provide an overview of Hume's historical narration of the development of Britain's foreign policy in the wake of the emergence of a Europe of independent states united by commerce. It was suggested that *The History of England* would arouse a mixed response from any philosophically-minded cleric. Hume had provided a compelling account of the evolving interests over which Europeans went to war in a way that deftly tied together the personal psychology of his characters with the organic progress of society. Yet no Christian could accept his account of the effect of priestcraft on policy, or of that of superstition and enthusiasm on the social order.

Robertson's relationship to history was naturally conditioned by both his Reformed theology and by his social standing as the leading ecclesiastical politician of his day. This chapter will suggest how Robertson's views on Church government and his vision of the international order were informed by his early exposure to the Stoic philosophy pervasive of his milieu. It will proceed to consider how these perspectives were brought to bear on the work that served as the blueprint for his overall historical theodicy, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance*, a work that addressed the possibility of the providential reunion of all God's children through the workings of European empire. The chapter will conclude with a brief look at Robertson's early reviews and the light they shed on the formulation of his historical orientation.

If the always highly personal, occasionally distinctly wayward reminiscences of his grand-nephew, Lord Brougham, can be trusted, William Robertson got his stoicism from his mother. 'More stern, and even severe, than amiable', the domestic regime of

Eleanor Pitcairn instilled in her son an 'inclination towards the Stoical system of morals, and even to a certain degree of Stoical feeling'.¹ A possibly less rigorous if more cerebral introduction to the stoic world-view rested upon his father's book shelves, in the theological works of the Arminian divines Le Blanc, Limborch, Turrentine and Samuel Werenfels.² Werenfels, Professor of Divinity at the University of Basel, and weary footsoldier of the paper wars of religion, had despaired of the 'party-zeal' that frustrated the Grotian project of re-unification of the reformed churches. Theological disputation, far from providing consolation to the spiritually disorientated, had only managed to exacerbate antagonisms and provide cover for the baser passions. Werenfels had lamented that,

how very apt to corrupt Men's Judgments are the *Emulation, and Envy, and Suspicion, the Hatred and Anger, and Jealousy, and all those inveterate Passions* which reign so much amongst men of Learning? 'The Understanding certainly must be Clouded and Reason fettered, where these Passions have the upperhand?' They deprive the most Judicious of that Clearness of Apprehension, that Easiness and Sedateness of Mind, that Candor and Moderation and Fairness, and that upright Intention, which are much more necessary to make a right Judgment, than the Knowledge of Languages, of History, of Arts, and the abstrusest points of Learning.³

Academic theology had become for Werenfels a cesspool of 'intestine commotion'; honest Christians in search of inward equilibrium, let alone the keys to the kingdom, should give such disputants a wide birth. 'Let Divines enjoy these darling Fancies', Werenfels recommended, 'the Thistles and Briars in their Schools, which common

¹ H. Brougham, 'Robertson', in *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, ed. Jeffrey Smitten, p. 258.

² Robertson was apparently particularly taken with Werenfels' *De Logomachiis eruditorum, et de mereteoris orationis*. One must bear in mind, of course, that the orthodox Erskine, keen to maintain the reputation of his friend in Presbyterian circles, would not have been inclined to stress a formative role for Werenfels' potentially heterodox theological works. cf. John Erskine, 'Apendix to a Funeral Sermon on Dr. Robertson' in *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, in *Works*, p. 264.

³ Samuel Werenfels, *Three Discourses: One, a Defence of Private Judgment; The Second, Against the Authority of the Magistrate over Conscience; The Third, Some Considerations concerning the Reuniting of Protestants* (London, 1718).

Christians may safely be ignorant of and despise.’⁴ In religion no less than in politics, the temptation of faction could be resisted through the cultivation of the stoic virtues. More speculatively, the Professor’s mindset suggested that weariness of theological disputation that was a psychological pre-requisite of toleration. Robertson and his fellow Moderates were to take Werenfels’ message to heart, and to scrupulously avoid direct theological controversy throughout their ministerial careers.

However intense Robertson’s youthful embrace of the Stoa was, it was certainly reinforced at University. John Stephenson, the well loved professor of logic at Edinburgh, read from Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers*, and Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy*, both of which elaborated the tenets of Hellenic and Hellenistic Stoicism in depth.⁵ Robertson’s first literary project, an aborted translation of the *Meditations* of the Roman Emperor and stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius (1742), reflected the philosophical orientation of his education. His translation was a partly auto-didactic endeavour; Robertson seems to have learned to write in English by translating into it. Yet, as was to be the case throughout his career, he offered his writings as vehicles for practical instruction. *The Meditations* was not an abstract or systematic work of philosophy, but a series of improving vignettes on how to come to terms with one’s inner development and social obligations.

The central tenet of stoic cosmology and ethics was the inter-connectedness of all things, of man with nature and man with his fellow man. Marcus Aurelius had discerned

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19

⁵ Jeffrey Smitten ‘Introduction to the Miscellaneous Works’ in *Miscellaneous Works*, p. xiii.
cf. Thomas Stanley *The History of Philosophy: Containing The Lives, Opinions, Actions and Discourses of the Philosophers of Every Sect* (Third Edition, London, 1701).

in all of nature the same spark of the divine; no object within it alienated from the larger whole. 'All things,' he had rhapsodised,

are linked & bound together by a sacred knot, & nothing is foreign or strange to another. For all things are arranged and disposed with reference to each other, & jointly contribute to adorn the world. For there is but one order thro' all things, one God in all things, one substance, one law, one common principle of reason & truth to all intelligent creatures, & one perfection to all creatures of the same species & endowed with the same reason.⁶

An eighteenth-century readership was unlikely to take this as literally as Marcus Aurelius had probably intended; *logos*, or the celestial mind-fire that for ancient Stoics physically permeated the material world, could be understood metaphorically as that aspect of the divine shared by all of God's creation. This more theocentric reading found support in other passages that could be understood as providing a more orthodox understanding of God's particular providence in human affairs. The Emperor had continued that,

the works of the Gods are full of marks of their providence; & even those things which are attributed to chance & fortune, do not happen without a natural concatenation & connection with those things which are established by providence. From it do all things flow. Besides this there is an inevitable Necessity which always advances the good of that Whole of which you are a part and that which the happiness & preservation of the whole requires must needs be for the good of every particular.⁷

Such a view left little room for contingency in the interconnected operations of the world, an insight that had a powerful ethical implication. The Emperor had discounted the possibility of divergence of interest between component part and larger whole; providence worked toward the common good. This in turn had informed the Emperor's conception of history. Understanding the workings of providence in human affairs required grasping the benign continuity of its temporal framework. Marcus Aurelius had emphasised that there could be no sharp dislocation between past, present, and future:

In the Universe whatever events succeeded, they follow naturally upon what went before. They are not like a series of distinct independent numbers taking place by a fatal necessity.

⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, translated by W. Robertson, NLS: MSS 3954.

⁷ *Ibid.*

But it is a beauteous arrangement. And as things are linked & united together with harmony & proportion, so there does not appear only a hated succession, but an admirable correspondence & connection of events.⁸

History, for Marcus Aurelius, did not merely reveal a fundamental logic; historical change *was* the unfolding of that very logic. The enjoyment of the detached observer in the unfolding of events was both cerebral and aesthetic. ‘Accustom yourself to reflect’, enjoined Marcus Aurelius, ‘that there is nothing so agreeable to the nature of the Universe, as to delight in changing the things that are, & unmaking others like unto them. Every thing that is, in some respect, is the seed of what is to be.’ All history was a narrative not only of change but also of progress.

Marcus Aurelius expounded an ethics built upon his cosmology. His first injunction was to comprehend and move in harmony with the larger whole of which one was a part. If men were united through a common *logos*, he had written, ‘then we have one common law, & must be fellow citizens, & if fellow citizens we must be members of the same political society, & consequently the World is like to a great City.’ In the view of a sovereign who had counted himself *Dominus Mundi*, the world as single *civitas* might have seemed an expression of mundane reality. In a modern Europe of independent states, however, the assertion amounted to a declaration of cosmopolitanism. The Emperor’s own ethical model was, appropriately enough, the virtuous Roman statesman; Stoic virtues were in effect the civic virtues required of a sincere and patriotic steward of the common good. Virtue required active engagement with the world; to neglect public affairs was to ostracise oneself from one’s fellow citizens and to act out of step with both nature and one’s inner light, for man was inescapably sociable. The

⁸ *Ibid.*

Emperor had thus commended living in harmony with others and avoidance of unnecessary personal disputes or political factions as the cardinal duties of the individual to his society. This required a healthy measure of patience and tolerance of others' foibles and folly, as well as the humbling realisation that one's own deepest passions and most cherished interests were the natural by-product of an ephemeral state of affairs. 'The World is a perpetual changing', Marcus Aurelius had reminded, 'and Life is but opinion.'⁹ Living in harmony with the world entailed nothing less than the humble contextualisation and subordination of one's particular passions and partisanship to the larger interest of the whole. Even for the committed Stoic, this required almost heroic feats of humility and self-command. Robertson was not to finish his translation, as he had now to prepare for his ministerial 'trials', as well as because the translation of Francis Hutcheson had beaten him to the presses, but all the historian's subsequent writings were to bear witness to the moderate and sociable cosmopolitanism of the Emperor's philosophy.¹⁰

Robertson would not find these abstract concerns as he entered upon his ministerial career. Theological faction in Scotland, far from having been neatly eliminated by the re-establishment of Presbyterianism in 1690, was, if anything, on the increase throughout the eighteenth-century. At the age of twenty-two, Robertson followed his father into the ministry at a turbulent juncture in the Kirk's history.¹¹ It was a mark of Robertson's skill at riding the choppy waters of religious faction that the worldly and urbane minister rose to prominence and eventually to eminence within the

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 12-13.

¹⁰ J. Smitten, 'Introduction to the Miscellaneous Works,' *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, in *Works*, p. xvii.

¹¹ S. J. Brown, 'William Robertson and the Scottish Enlightenment, in idem, *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 9.

General Assembly during an age of religious revival and populist evangelical fervour. The developments of the 1740s were crucial in the formation of the mindset of a group of young ministers that would assume the title of 'Moderates' and dominate the ecclesiastical politics of Scotland. The spiritually transformative experience of the weavers of the small parish of Cambuslang, near Glasgow, spearheaded a general 'awakening' that engulfed much of the west of Scotland. Ned Landsman has argued that to a degree not properly appreciated by modern scholarship, both Moderate and Popular parties developed as a reaction to this unsettling development, and differed primarily in their contrasting methods of containing this burst of enthusiasm. Moderates chose to fall back on the firm discipline of the laws of the Kirk, the members of the Popular party to the equally firm discipline of the tenets of Calvin. Robertson's Popular opponent and fellow minister at Gladsmuir, John Erskine, had initially celebrated the millennial implications of awakening on both sides of the Atlantic, yet soon repented as the prospect of Awakening corrupting into Methodism shook him to his core.¹² The commonality between the young Moderates and Evangelicals was fatally obscured, however, by their sharp disagreement over the issue of the lay patronage of ministers. Lay patronage had provoked a major secession movement from the Kirk in 1733, a movement that was itself divided in 1747 over the acceptability of the Burgess Oath, a public affirmation of the legally established religion. Both 'Burgher' and 'Anti-Burgher' movements gained momentum as the century progressed, highlighting in the minds of Moderates the problematic relationship of modern Presbyterianism with the Covenanting dynamic, and

¹² N. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775', in J. Dwyer and R. Sher (eds.) *Sociability and Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, pp. 197-198.

even calling into question the future integrity of a unified and reformed Scottish Kirk.¹³ Thus the prism through which perceived theological tensions within the Kirk revealed themselves was the conflict over Patronage.¹⁴ At bottom, the question was who had the right to choose a replacement for a departed minister: the crown, the propertied elders of the Kirk sessions, or the congregation as a whole? While the departure in 1733 of the followers of Ebenezer Erskine largely removed the last of the three options from contention, proponents of crown patronage remained in constant fear that to give ground to the 'middle' option was, in fact, to remove any effective barrier against a populist and Covenanting rear-guard assault. This was the position of a circle of young ministers who were to go on to establish a formidable literary reputation and to a surprising degree set the cultural agenda of the Scottish Enlightenment.¹⁵ The irony was that Robertson and his circle, who wished, at least as a practical matter, to support enlightened lay patronage, had to confront directly the arguments not of latter day Melvilles, but of a kindred spirit and intellectual hero, the philosopher Francis Hutcheson.

Hutcheson was no evangelical. An Ulster-Scot and member of the republican circle of Viscount Molesworth, he arrived in 1730 as professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow under a storm cloud of controversy. From the moment of his arrival unto the hour of his death, Hutcheson's commitment to the letter of Glasgow's distinctly stern variant of Calvinism had been held in constant question. Hutcheson's own beliefs, certainly latitudinarian, possibly Arminian, had necessitated that discretion overrule candour in his own discussion of theological specifics. He made a virtue of

¹³ J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (Oxford, 1960), p. 263.

¹⁴ R. Sher and A. Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party in the Church of Scotland, 1750-1805', in *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408-1929* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 197-220.

¹⁵ R. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985).

necessity, negatively contrasting the sectarian enthusiasm of his detractors with his own more ecumenical love of civic liberty. Hutcheson lamented that 'the warm zealots of all sides have represented all schemes of religion opposite their own, opposite also to all goodness.' Yet, he insisted, 'Virtue ever was and will be popular, where men can vote freely.'¹⁶ The philosopher of benevolence and the moral sense nonetheless was an ardent foe of crown patronage, not for theological but for political reasons.

Hutcheson's position on patronage was that enshrined in the 'old Whig' settlement of 1690, reaffirmed by the General Assembly in 1732. He understood the attempt of the crown to meddle in the selection of church ministers as yet another encroachment of the royal prerogative, which all friends of liberty and supporters of the independency of the landed interest need resist at all cost. It was this civic humanist inspired metaphor of the Kirk elder as freeholder that dominated the anti-patronage rhetoric of the eighteenth century, and it was this conception that Robertson's circle had to confront in their written dissent against a ruling by the General Assembly which they regarded as a dangerous appeasement to popular enthusiasm. In 1752 the Commission of the General Assembly had ruled not to punish the presbytery of Inverkeithing for refusing to induct Andrew Richardson as its new minister. The *Reasons of Dissent in the Inverkeithling Case* (1752), printed in the *Scots Magazine* and as a separate pamphlet, not only represented Dr. Robertson's first introduction to the public sphere but provides a reasonably concise *précis* of his political philosophy. The arguments Robertson deployed demonstrated his familiarity with juridical discourse as well as a true Stoic's appreciation for order and subordination.

¹⁶ Op. cit. in Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman*, p. 194.

Robertson began by acknowledging populist fears. He conceded that there had been past instances of abuse of patronage, and granted that of all possible tyrannies, ecclesiastical tyranny was 'the most grievous and insupportable.' Yet, having acknowledged these concerns, Robertson proceeded to turn the populists' own patriotic rhetoric against them. If the populists could implore the elders of the Kirk as citizens to resist patronage as tyrannical corruption of first principles, so the Moderates could defend adherence to the practice as 'the only means of insuring that the present most excellent Constitution of this Church may be preserved; and may be handed down to posterity, as free and uncorrupted, and as sound and vigorous, as they have received it from their Ancestors.'¹⁷ The deployment of 'ancient-constitutionalist' rhetoric not only turned the tables on their opponents by portraying them as 'dangerous innovators', but also provided an opportunity to redescribe that constitution in reference to contractarian Whig principles with a neo-stoic gloss. The ordered system of the Scottish Kirk, Robertson argued, paralleled and reflected the ordered system of society generally. The two leading principles of the 'Kirk by law established' were the 'parity of its ministers and the Subordination of its Judicaries.' Robertson insisted that the degree of liberty provided by the first principle made rigorous defence of the second principle all the more vital. Membership in any society entailed duties as well as rights, and the imperative to 'follow the judgment of society' held whenever an individual voluntarily entered into society. 'There can be no Union, and by consequence there can be no society,' Robertson warned, 'where there is no Subordination.'¹⁸ Presbyteries had a firm obligation to acknowledge the sovereignty of the General Assembly and to subordinate itself to its command.

¹⁷ 'Reasons of Dissent in the Inverkeithing Case, 1752' in *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

For Robertson, the principle of subordination had never been in graver danger, as the Inverkeithling case had revealed that, 'a Spirit of Disobedience to its Laws and Orders has most unaccountably prevailed, and grows stronger and bolder every day.'¹⁹ This spirit of disobedience hid behind the popular rhetoric of liberty of conscience, interpreted as a species of ecclesiastical resistance theory by which any directive of the General Assembly perceived as inconsistent with the 'Laws of Christ' could be with impunity subjected to the will of heaven. For Robertson, this amounted to Epicureanism in principle, to anarchy in practice. Liberty of conscience was the false mantra of dangerous evangelicals who threatened to subvert the basic principles of society on their head, by sacrificing the integrity of the whole for the narrow interest of the part. Subordination was total, or it was nothing. At one level, Robertson had employed a stoic and juridical idiom against the republican language of the Popular party. This allowed him to subtly shift the argument from patronage to discipline. More fundamentally, his reasons for dissent portrayed popular enthusiasm as an enemy of true religion, which could only be protected by a secure rule of law. A General Assembly secure in its sovereignty would not lead to Erastianism through the back door, but prove the securest defence against it.

Robertson and his circle did not win the day, but the Inverkeithling affair secured his reputation as a major player in the ecclesiastical politics of the Kirk. His reputation within the Kirk had reached the point where he was invited in 1755 to preach to the annual assembly of The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance*, Robertson's only published sermon, has most often been read in the context of posthumously collected complete

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

editions, and has become divorced from its contemporary context, the civilising mission of the Scottish Kirk to the infidel populations of the Highlands and of North America. Contemporaries could have made no such mistake, for Robertson's sermon, as with all sermons published by the society, came attached with a short history of the organisation, which spelled out its aims and objectives.²⁰ These aims were genuinely ambitious, amounting to nothing less than the total transformation of highland society through missionary activity and instruction in the 'useful arts' of agriculture and manufacture.²¹ Yet the transformation of highland society was not the extent of, or perhaps even the most ambitious aspect, of the societies remit. The conversion of the similarly barbarous indigenous populations of North America was popularly understood as no less crucial to the national interest.

At a time, when the friendship of the *Indian* nations appears to be of so great consequence towards the security and preservation of our *American* colonies, no attempt to instruct them, however feeble, ought to be regarded with indifference. Every person among them whom we gain over to the belief and practice of true Christianity, becomes from that moment the ally of *Britain*, and is bound to its interests by a powerful and sacred tie.²²

At one level, this revealed a conventional invocation of the socially cohesive powers of confession; at another, a strategic apprehension that the scramble for the Americas among the great powers, if won by the French, would turn the Native Americans into a new Popish bulwark against British expansion and commerce.

For, considering it in a political view, it seems the best calculated, in a consistency

²⁰ 'State of the Society in Scotland, For propagating Christian Knowledge, for the Year 1754.' in W. Robertson, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, to which is attached, a brief History of the Society* (Edinburgh, 1755), pp. 50-51.

²¹ Posterity has not been altogether kind to their endeavours. Allan Macinnes informs us that, 'In equating gaelic with barbarity and in claiming that other religious denominations in Gaeldom were outwith the Christian pale, the Kirk was virulently supported from 1709 by the shocktroops of Presbyterianism – the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in Scotland, whose Gaelic acronym was appropriately C.C.C.P.' A. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce, and the House of Stuart 1603-1788* (Melksham, 1996) p. 178.

²² 'State of the Society in Scotland,' p. 57.

with the genius and spirit of *Britons*, to secure the peace and inland trade of our colonies, and balance the growing power of the *French* in *North-America*. *Indian* scholars would apparently be so many new subjects to his Majesty. –They would greatly strengthen that chain which binds the *Indians* to our interest.

Yet the members of the society were under no illusion concerning the difficulty of the task. The path to the successful conversion of the Indian lay strewn with a thousand obstacles.

The *Indians* have not the knowledge of GOD. –They have no mode of worship. They are scattered over the continent in small tribes. Each tribe has a different language. They are strangers to agriculture. Hunting is their chief employment. They follow their game to a great distance from the ordinary place of their abode. When at home, a whole tribe is not collected into one town, nor within a small compass of ground; but each little town has its own inhabitants. These towns are for the most part many miles distant from each other, and the nearest of them some hundred miles from the *American* shore.

Nor were these the extent of the difficulties. Scottish missionaries sent across the Atlantic had discovered a troublingly latitudinarian sensibility among the feathered heathens that rendered them stubbornly resistant to conversion. ‘For just at that time the *Indians* pretended to have received a revelation from heaven; which, after having represented the evil of some particular vices, and recommended to them the sacrificing of a deer, and other superstitious and idolatrous practices, concludes by telling them, that GOD made two worlds, one for the white people, and one for the *Indians*: and that the white people had no business to come into the *Indian* country, much less to persuade them to embrace their religion; for that he had commanded the white people to worship GOD in their own way, and the *Indians* to worship GOD in theirs’. More alarmingly still, the Indians had taken a distinctly dim view of those who professed nothing but a disinterested view to the futurity of their immortal souls. Previous ill treatment had left the Indians thoroughly jaded concerning missionary intentions, professing that ‘though the white people made some pretences of instructing the *Indians*; yet they had no design

of doing them good, but to put money in their pockets, and make the *Indians* much worse.' One might have thought that the presumably insurmountable logistical, not to mention attitudinal, barriers to the work of the S.P.C.K would have proved sufficient to provoke a crippling crisis of confidence. Domestic events, however, provided the spiritual shot in the arm that overseas success could not.

For the work of the Society gained an entirely new and pressing relevance in the wake of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. The Rebellion was unquestionably the formative event in the political education of the Moderates, an event that clarified allegiances and underscored existing prejudices. An aspect of the Rebellion not always sufficiently emphasised was that it was always seen as auxiliary to an imminent French conquest. In 1739 Walpole's government had declared war against Spain, and a group of disaffected Jacobites had sought to seize the opportunity of likely British conflict with France to urge the French crown to support a Stuart Restoration. Upon the death of Fleury, Cardinal Tenacin assumed responsibility for organising support for Charles Stuart's invasion. Tenacin's project was reported in the London press to entail winning the support of disaffected Scots with the promise of independence and the disaffected English with the promise of cheaper beer.²³ While effective French support for the Jacobites never

²³ 'To stir up the *Scots*, by enforcing to them, in the strongest Terms, the many Disadvantages they labour under from the Union of the two Kingdoms: The Misery they are reduced to, from a slavish Dependence upon the *English* Court: Their Nation drained of its Money, by sending Members to the Parliament held at *Westminster*; who, by that means, are cajoled and bribed into the Interests and Purposes of designing Ministers, and leave their own Country bleeding in Shame and Poverty: That a Prince, descended from the Royal Race of their own Kings, is now an Exile! his only Support the Benevolence of Foreign Courts! to the eternal Ignominy of so warlike and brave a People, who repelled the fierce Assaults of the *Romans*, when the most powerful and distant Empires of the *East* could not resist their spreading Conquests: That the national Affronts they daily receive from the *English* are insupportable: That there is no Expedient left to redress their Injuries, than a Dissolution of the Union, and restoring themselves to their ancient Independence upon the *English*. . . [and to win over the English] All Taxes, which have the least Appearance of a Grievance to the inferior People, to be taken off; particularly Excise upon Malt: This will have great Weight upon the laborious Part of the Kingdom, who consume most of their little Income in drinking Strong-beer, and in which consists

materialised, fear of French invasion became a lasting aspect of Scottish political psychology, one Robertson was later to address head on with his *Charles V*. Robertson experienced the conflict not as a neutral observer but as an armed combatant and member of the college volunteers. While the volunteer's practical contribution to the defence of the city hovered awkwardly between ineffectual and non-existent, the warmth of their commitment to the Whig-Hanoverian regime against what they perceived as a last-ditch rear-guard assault by the forces of political and religious reaction should not be underestimated.²⁴ The immediate legacy of the rebellion, following the decisive victory at the battle of Culloden was an unprecedented degree of determined intervention on the part of the British state in Scottish affairs, uncomfortably acquiesced to by the lowland Whig establishment, but earning the lasting enmity of partisan historians of Gaeldom.²⁵ In the years following the rebellion, the Society's annual fundraising sermon served as an occasion for public meditation on the 'highland problem.' These sermons explored the issues surrounding how to bring the underdeveloped civilisation of the northwest into the British fold, and how to pacify it through religious, cultural and economic incorporation. Highlanders fully won round to Whig Presbyterian culture would not prove amenable to the French interest.

While the first published sermon by the young minister Adam Ferguson was not sponsored by the Society, it addressed many of the same issues, having been preached in

their greatest Happiness.' *Cardinal Tenacin's Plan Presented to the French King, for Settling the Pretender's Family Upon the British Throne, and Compleating the Long-concerted SCHEME of UNIVERSAL MONARCHY in the HOUSE of BOURBON* (London, 1745), pp.10-17.

²⁴ Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 37-44.

²⁵ 'The immediate aftermath of the 45 was marked by systematic state terrorism, characterised by a genocidal intent that verged on ethnic cleansing; by banditry as a form of social protest; and by cultural alienation as chiefs and leading gentry abandoned their traditional obligations as protectors and patrons in pursuit of their commercial aspirations as proprietors.' Allan Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce, and the House of Stewart*, p. 218.

1745 in the 'Ersh' language to a highland regiment of the British army. The purpose of the sermon was twofold, to inculcate enthusiasm for military service, and to show that such service was necessary to resist a rebellion directly resultant from French attempts to impose a 'popish tyranny' upon the British Isles. Ferguson was eager to counter the notion that the French crown was a neutral party in a localised dynastic conflict, and that those who thought otherwise were the hapless dupes of a cynical power far shrewder than they.²⁶ Ferguson's purpose was to dislodge any residual loyalty, or, as was more likely, any residual sense of grudging duty towards the House of Stuart, by painting them as servile pawns of an entirely alien interest. As added disincentive, Ferguson stoked up fear of the inevitable religious persecution following a Jacobite victory:

What can we expect in our civil or religious Concerns from a Popish King, but the Subversion of our Liberty, and the entire Corruption of our Religion? May we not expect to have our Bibles snatched from our Hands, ourselves dragged to the Stake and the Gibbet for perusing the Word of God? Ignorance and Superstition again resume their Tyranny in these Lands, and we and our Posterity bend to the unnatural Dominion of Priests and Churchmen?²⁷

The sentiment had a self-subverting implication, and Ferguson was not long to continue in his capacity as a Presbyterian minister. But the thrust of his message was to be taken up by others.

The Reverend Robert Wallace, though he was to become an ecclesiastical opponent to Ferguson, strongly seconded his understanding of Jacobite rebellion as popish plot in his sermon *Ignorance and Superstition a Source of Violence and Cruelty* (1745), preached to the Society at its annual meeting. Though he was to come to prominence in the 1750s as a critic of David Hume's theory of ancient population,

²⁶ A. Ferguson, *A Sermon Preached in the Ersh Language to his Majesty's First Highland Regiment of Foot, Commanded by Lord John Murray, At their Cantonment at Camberwell, on the 18th Day of December, 1745* (Edinburgh, 1745), p. 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Wallace at the time occupied the semi-official position of government 'Correspondent' at the pleasure of the leader of the 'Squadron' interest, the Marquess of Tweeddale, and could thus be seen as offering within the Kirk a perspective smiled upon by the establishment.²⁸

Wallace began his sermon by emphasising that knowledge was not in itself any guarantor of good behaviour. Knowledge was morally neutral, indeed the less men of 'bad principles and wicked Dispositions' knew, the better. This highlighted the urgent necessity of correct education; for Wallace no small responsibility for the recent disturbances lay in the inculcation of false principles. He was particularly keen to underscore the contrast of Stoic principles of subordination with Epicurean anarchical notions of human conduct. Wallace maintained that the firmer one's conception of the 'exact regularity' and 'necessary subordination' of all the various parts of the natural world, the more one would feel aesthetically drawn to that order and conform one's conduct in accordance with it.²⁹ Wallace was here implying that the utter lack of a proper education amongst the highlanders had led them to the paradox of rebellion in the cause of absolutism, which led him to reflect more generally concerning the relationship between superstition and despotism. 'Now, these tyrannical Governments have fixed their Seat,' Wallace contended, 'and taken the firmest Root in Nations blinded by Heathenish Superstition and Mahometan Darkness: Ignorance and Error is their firmest Support; nor could they have submitted during so many Ages, had men enjoyed the pure Light of the Gospel, and been blessed with just and reasonable Notions of Morals and

²⁸ Ian D. L. Clark, 'From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805' in N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison, (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 200-224.

²⁹ Robert Wallace, *Ignorance and Superstition a Source of Violence and Cruelty* (Edinburgh, 1746).

Religion; and for this Reason, these Governments knowing their own Interest, cherish Ignorance and Error with a superstitious Care.³⁰ The delusion of the highland rebels was ample proof for Wallace that possession of Christianity in itself was insufficient for the preservation of liberty and order. He could conceive of no better illustration of ignorance as the assiduously courted handmaiden of tyranny than the rise and progress of the Popish tyranny, as even the most cursory glance at the history of Europe would illustrate.³¹ Now was no time for *apathea*, but rather a vindication that some principles were benign and improving, others pernicious and all too recently on the march. In Wallace's mind, the '45 rebellion was entirely the fruit of the 'ignorance and superstition' of those who lived north of the barbarian frontier. These 'savages' had no just notion of religion or morals, merely a supine submission to the law of their chieftain.

This passivity and lack of discernment rendered them susceptible to a would- be tyrant who would gleefully have overthrown the constitution and rendered Britain a true

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³¹ 'And here we should recall to our Thoughts the tyrannical Dominion this Church hath usurped, and exercised over Mankind, her unjust and exorbitant Demands, and Exactions of Money, under the Pretence of the Service of God and his Church, but in Reality for maintaining the numerous Swarms, and various Orders of the Clergy in lazy Opulence, and the Affluence and Magnificence of worldly Power, in which Design she hath also succeeded; (tho' by the vilest Arts and most shameful Impositions) and by amassing so great a Part of the Wealth of Christians, hath drained and impoverished the People in a most merciless manner. We should remember likewise the cruel Persecutions she hath raised in ancient and modern Times, against all who presumed to differ from her, and refused to submit to her Authority; the bloody Massacres which she excited in *France* soon after the Reformation, and in *Ireland*, in the Time of our Civil Wars; the Cruelties exercised against the Protestants of *France*, after the Edict of *Nantz* was recalled, by one of the bigotted Princes of her Communion, out of pure Zeal to he Church; especially we should remember a standing Monument of her Violence and Cruelty, in the dreadful Tortures and horrible Executions of the Court of Inquisition, and the pernicious Doctrines of that Church, by which Breach of Faith, annulling and violating the most sacred Oaths, and all Sorts of Barbarities for the sake of Religion, are justified. Now, these Cruelties are a lively Example of the Psalmist's Observation. As this tyrannical Hierarchy was raised up at first, made gradual Advances, always has been and still is supported by ignorance and Error; as it began and came to its Height in dark and ignorant Ages, and was built upon the Ruins of Knowledge and Learning; and 'tis only in this Sense that we ought to understand and allow the Maxim, *That Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion*, meaning a Devotion to a bloody and persecuting Church, and a Devotion that leads to Violence and Cruelty'. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

tyranny.³² The present rebellion was thus also a supreme vindication of the urgent and pressing need of the work of the Society. 'Should we not therefore, even for our own Sakes, support a Society for the Reformation of these *Highland Clans*?' Wallace asked rhetorically, 'when we have seen and felt that they are capable of doing so much Mischief.' Wallace concluded his sermon by inviting the congregation to bow their heads and join him in the prayer that,

God in his Providence would enlighten the dark Places of the Earth with true Knowledge, and especially the Knowledge of true Religion: that he would put an End to *Pagan* and *Mahometan* Superstition and Darkness, deliver the Christian Churches from Popish Ignorance and Tyranny, put a Stop to Persecution for conscience Sake, and to all the Cruelties which flow from Bigotry, Ignorance and Error: That he would preserve the reformed Churches from all the secret and open Attempts of the Church of *Rome*, and bring the Reformation to a greater Ripeness and Perfection; and that he would raise up Instruments, and give Success to all Means and Endeavours for enlightening the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.³³

In 1750, the young minister and Robertson's closest intellectual friend, Hugh Blair, seconded Wallace's prayer with a qualified Amen. Five years on, the sense of danger and apprehension was in great measure dissipated, and Blair was in a position to offer to the Society more positive arguments for the benefits of Christian knowledge. After a mildly ironic invocation of the howls of protest raised against the twin scourges of superstition and enthusiasm, Blair posed the question to the sceptics, 'Is this then the Case, that all Principles, except good ones, are supposed to be of such mighty Energy? Strange! that false Religion should do so much, and true Religion so little.' For Blair, religion was the rock upon which every society was necessarily built, and without which, sociability would falter. 'For, first of all' Blair argued,

³² 'The Pretender is a most bigotted Papist, and has been educated in the most superstitious and tyrannical Maxims of the Courts of *France* and *Rome*; That he lyes under the most strict of Obligations to both these Courts, the most dangerous Enemies of the *British* Nation, That he must have conceived the most bitter Enmity agaisnt the Form of our Government in Church and State.' *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

it forms them for Society. It civilizes Mankind. It tames the Fierceness of their Passions, and wears off the Barbarity of their Manners. Without some Notions of Religion, it is much to be questioned, whether any regular Society ever subsisted, or could subsist, in the World. All those who, in early Times, attempted to reduce wandering and scattered Men unto Society, found it necessary to begin with some Institution of Religion: And the wisest Legislators of old, thro' the whole Progress of their Systems of Government, treated it as necessary and essential to Civil Polity. If even those imperfect Forms of Religion, mixed with so much Error, were important to Society; how much more, that reasonable and true Worship of God which the Gospel teaches? True Religion introduces the Idea of regular Subjection, by accustoming Mankind to the Awe of superior Power, in the Deity, joined with the Esteem of superior Wisdom and Goodness. It is, by its Nature, an associating Principle, creating new and sacred Bonds of Union amongst Men. Common Assemblies for religious Worship, and the joint Veneration of one God; the Sense of being all, in common, dependent on the same supreme Protection, and bound by the same Ties to Duty, Sharers of the same Benefits of Religion, and Expectants of the same Reward; all this has a Tendency to awaken the Sense of our friendly Relation, to knit us together, and strengthen our mutual Connection.³⁴

Religion, for Blair, not only brought people together but also kept them together, by providing the psychological foundation of the rule of law. Without hope of reward and fear of punishment in a future state, no form of contract could carry any weight, as all moral obligation drew its inspiration from God.³⁵ This was the voluntarist view of the source of moral duty espoused by Samuel Pufendorf, and Blair, who had written his own student thesis combating the 'pernicious system' of Hobbes, would have been entirely familiar with the lineage of his argument. While the thrust of this defence of the social utility of religion was broadly neo-stoic and natural jurisprudential, it would be very wrong to imply that Blair was any more successful in avoiding the temptation of factious dispute in voicing his own ecclesiastical preference than Pufendorf himself had been.

³⁴ H. Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind* (Edinburgh, 1750), pp. 23-24.

³⁵ 'That last and greatest Pledge of Veracity, an *Oath*, without which no Society can subsist, derives its whole Authority from the Reverence of God, to whom it is a solemn Appeal. banish religious Principle, and you loosen all the Bonds of Society: You shake the fundamental Pillar of all mutual Trust and Confidence amongst Men; nay, you destroy the Security arising from *Laws* themselves. For human Laws and human Sanctions cannot extend to numberless Cases, in which the Safety of Mankind is highly concerned. They would be very ineffectual Means of maintaining the Order and Peace of Society, if there were no Checks upon Men, from the Sense of Divine Legislation; if no Belief of Divine Rewards and Punishments were to come in Aid, of what human Rewards and Punishments so imperfectly provide for.' *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

Wallace would have found little to quarrel with in Blair's stinging denunciation of systems of ecclesiastical polity not in keeping with British liberty. Indeed, Blair seemed to paraphrase Wallace in his denunciation of 'nations blinded by *Mahometan* and *Pagan* darkness,' under which head he seemed to classify the 'darkness, oppression and slavery' of feudal Europe prior to the Reformation. Popish sovereigns fully understood this and trembled at the prospect of Protestant liberty unleashed within their domains, which was why free nations could never rest while the papal tyranny endured.³⁶

Blair did not need to remind his audience how the recent rebellion confirmed this through negative example. Highland Jacobites had never been anything more than pawns in Louis XV's ambitious scheme to re-establish a more hospitable government at Westminster. He was at pains to insist, however, that the programme of pacification commenced by the Whig government required the long-term committed backing of the Society if the Highlands were to remain obedient.

A Part of the Country, which may be considered as yet *rude* and *uncivilized*; where Society has scarcely got beyond its *Infant* State; and whither the Influence of Government and Order has very imperfectly reached: Where the Inhabitants, hitherto accustomed to no Subjection, except a slavish Dependence on their Chieftains, are inured to Rapine, totally negligent of the Arts of Peace, and Strangers to cultivated Life: Where the grossest *Ignorance* and *Superstition* have remarkably reigned, and have nourished, as their *proper* Offspring, a blind Attachment to some pernicious Notions of Government, artfully instilled into their Minds. If ever the Aid of religious Knowledge was necessary to establish and assist Society, it must be allowed to be necessary here: Especially, as we know Popish Emissaries have not been wanting among them, to sow their *poisonous* Principles; and to foment that *disaffected* Spirit, the violent Effects of which were felt a few Years ago; when we saw them rushing, like a Torrent from their own bleak Mountains, to spread Confusion and Terror through a peaceful Land. –If so many of our Countrymen have hitherto been not only *useless*, but even *dangerous* to the rest of the Society, ought not all wise and good Men to encourage the Design of propagating among them those Principles of true religious Knowledge, which may *reform* them from Barbarity, and *unite* them to the rest of the Society? Regard to our own Safety and Tranquillity might alone recommend this Design, tho' no *higher* Motive were applied to.³⁷

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

The transformation of highland culture was indeed a political imperative, but need not be justified solely on prudential grounds. Blair further appealed to the Christian charity of his audience, 'What a melancholy View does it give of human Nature, to think of so many *dark Places of the Earth* that are *full of the Habitations of Cruelty*; where, either sunk in total Darkness, or enslaved to wild Superstition, Mankind pass their wretched Days, scarcely rais'd a Degree above the *Beasts that perish!*'³⁸ Virtue demanded that one dig deep into one's pockets to aid the cause of civilisation.

Robertson's own sermon, preached before the society in 1755, ten years after the rebellion, was more successful than Blair's in lowering the theological and political temperature of debate on the 'highland question' while still offering an endorsement of the good work of the Society. The Sermon, entitled 'The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance' spelled out how human affairs are artfully contrived by God to further his own ends. 'God manifested the mystery of the Gospel,' Robertson began, 'at a time when the world stood most in need of such a revelation, and was best prepared for receiving it.'³⁹ That time, it could be no accident, coincided with the expansion of the Roman Empire. 'At last', Robertson continued, 'the Roman ambition undertook the arduous enterprise of conquering the world, and conducted it with such refined policy, irresistible courage, and inimitable perseverance, as in the end crowned the attempt with success. *They trode down the kingdoms*, according to *Daniel's* prophetic description, *and by their exceeding strength they devoured the whole earth.*'⁴⁰ The Roman Empire, therefore, for all its sundry crimes against liberty, nevertheless achieved

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁹ *Sermon Upon the Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, &c.* in *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, in *Works*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 15 (italics in the original).

its divinely allotted purpose. It prepared the world for the coming of a more profound and lasting *imperium*, the empire of God. This was an argument familiar to Christian universal history since Orosius, that Christ condescended to be born in the reign of Caesar Augustus and thus bestowed legitimacy upon the Roman Empire. As discussed in Chapter one, this was also an argument employed by sixteenth-century apologists for English *imperium*.

‘By means of their victories,’ Robertson intoned, ‘the over-ruling wisdom of God established an empire, that really possesses the perpetuity and eternal duration, which they vainly arrogated to their own: He erected a *throne which shall continue for ever; and of the increase of that government there shall be no end.*’⁴¹ Robertson’s citation of the Book of Daniel at this point could not have been done in innocence. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar, prophesising the coming of the four great world empires, one translating to the next according to the divine will, was the scriptural inspiration and the thread of narrative continuity of Mosaic universal history. Robertson seemed to imply that the establishment of Christianity was the final *translatio imperii*, or transferral of empire. But the polite and worldly clergyman was not simply rehearsing the eschatology of the Fifth Monarchy Men, rather he was pointing out that the vainglory of the Romans had ironically created the social and commercial conditions through which the Good News could be most efficiently propagated. The legitimacy of the Kingdom of Heaven would justify itself through moral improvement; it would not, Robertson insisted, ‘re-establish virtue upon the same insecure foundation of civil government, but to erect it upon the eternal and immoveable basis of a religion, which teacheth righteousness by the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

authority of God.’⁴² While Robertson banished imperial apologetic to the realm of theology, he had *not* laid out a blueprint for any simple return to Mosaic historiography. For Robertson, God did not intervene directly in human affairs. Moral improvement would largely be the result of human endeavour; Christianity would re-establish virtue by rendering the people of the Earth polite.

Robertson was quite explicit that this providentially sanctioned dynamic was the potential corollary of European colonisation. ‘Under all disadvantages,’ Robertson continued, ‘the genius of the gospel exerts itself, civilizing the fiercest and most barbarous nations, and inspiring a gentleness of disposition, unknown to any other religion . . . It not only sanctifies our souls, but refines our manners; while it gives the promises of the next life, it improves and adorns the present.’⁴³ Yet Robertson proceeded to moderate his fervour; he was not so much celebrating the evangelical successes of empire as suggesting a potential it had not hitherto achieved:

That part of the world, wherein Christianity is established, infinitely surpasses the rest in all the sciences and improvements which raises one nation above another in reputation and power. Of this superiority the *Europeans* have availed themselves to the utmost, in every project for extending their empire or commerce; and have brought a great part of the globe into dependence, either upon their acts or their arms. Now the same attainments in science or policy, might be employed to good purpose, on the side of religion: And though hitherto subservient to the designs of interest or ambition, may we not flatter ourselves, that, at last, they shall become noble instruments in the hand of God, for preparing the world to receive the gospel.⁴⁴

But, remembering the context of his address, Robertson insisted that this was a project to begin at home, a project only now possible because ‘laws have been enacted with a most humane spirit, in order to retrieve that part of the kingdom from ignorance and barbarism, and to introduce the same regular government and independence which are the blessings

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 23

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 48

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

of other *British* subjects.’⁴⁵ The Rebellion had shown that the highlands were in need of a ‘new’ revelation. But now, Robertson allowed his audience to hope, through the work of the Society that they may be at last prepared to receive it.⁴⁶ The highly punitive post-‘45 legislation in Robertson’s mind had made possible the success of that project began by James VI a century and a half previously, the pacification of Gaeldom.

The literary public was evidently prepared to receive Robertson’s own revelation; the sermon went through five editions in his lifetime, and went some way towards locally establishing his reputation as a man of polite letters. In this new capacity Robertson made several important contributions to the short-lived first *Edinburgh Review* of 1755-56, a journal established to promote new Scottish literary efforts. The debut issue of *The Edinburgh Review* opened not only with a laudatory review of Robertson’s own sermon, but also with a lengthy notice of an Aberdonian publication of a new work by Alexander Gordon of Auchintoul, a retired Scottish officer of the Russian army, written by Robertson himself. *The History of Peter the Great Emperor of Russia; to which is prefixed, a short general history of the Country, from the rise of that Monarchy*; seemed to promise great things: ‘The attempt of Peter the Great towards civilizing that vast Empire, of which he was the Sovereign’, Robertson gushed, ‘is perhaps the most interesting object that the history of mankind presents to the view of a Philosopher.’⁴⁷ From the vantage point of philosophical history, the scale of the Czar’s achievement was almost incredible; he had turned the laws of historical development, the lumbering ‘casual operation of undesigned events’ on their head through sheer force of will. ‘The

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁴⁶ ‘New’, that is, to the Highlanders, not of course to reformed theology.

⁴⁷ W. Robertson, ‘Eight Book Reviews from the Original *Edinburgh Review*, 1755-56’, in *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, in *Works*, p. 49.

Czar of Muscovy is the first man who, unenlightened by science, and uninstructed by example', Robertson reminded his readers, 'conceived the vast design of civilizing sixteen millions of savages, and who, by operations the most amazing and adventurous, introduced armies and fleets, commerce and science, into an Empire where they were all unknown.'⁴⁸ Robertson's interest in Peter would have been piqued by passages in Voltaire's *History of Charles XII* (1732). Voltaire was later to write an official history of Peter for the Russian court, but his volume on the Swedish monarch contained a full panegyric to the Russian achievement.⁴⁹ Gordon's volumes had clearly raised high hopes, and they just as clearly proved deeply disappointing. The General's lifelong preoccupation with things military had left him, Robertson tactfully concluded, bereft of 'those sciences which inspire taste and elegance in composition.' As well as being badly written, the scope of the work was distressingly narrow. Gordon gave little space to the politics of domestic transactions, and Peter's vision of empire. The work was not entirely without interest for Robertson, however. He admired the complexity of Gordon's psychological portrait of the man himself, where with the obvious virtues of the hero 'were mingled, and often in extraordinary proportion, the vices of the man, the violence of the tyrant, and even, on some occasions, the fierceness of the Barbarian.'⁵⁰

If Robertson found the link between history and manners unsatisfactorily developed in the popular narrative history of his day, he found a more satisfactory marriage of the two in the less likely context of a work of historical jurisprudence. In

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ 'He established schools, academies, printing-works and libraries; the towns were civilized; clothes and customs changed little by little, although with difficulty. The Muscovites gradually came to know the meaning of organized society. Even superstitions were abolished; the patriarch was deprived of all authority, and the tsar proclaimed himself the religious head of state.' Voltaire, *The History of Charles XII* (London, 1976), pp. 44-45.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

1759 Robertson published in the *Critical Review* a lengthy review of the *Historical Law Tracts* of his friend Henry Home, Lord Kames. This work exemplified what had become a niche industry for Scottish publishers, historical jurisprudence. There were a number of factors conditioning the subject's remarkable flourishing in the years following the Jacobite rebellion: the independence of the Scottish bench, the inspiration of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois*, a long history of contact with the state of the art at continental universities, and more immediately a patriotic thirst for the keys to improvement. In 1746 Kames had inaugurated the modern Scottish pursuit of historical jurisprudence with his *Essays on Several Subjects Concerning British Antiquaries* (1746) as a patriotic exercise intended to undermine Jacobite political opinions by showing they had no foundation in history.⁵¹ If jurisprudence was the critique of law in terms of its rationality, historical jurisprudence added a temporal dimension to the subject's comparative approach to investigate the original conditions that had rendered rational those laws or institutions that later became antithetical to improvement.⁵² The intense Scottish interest in the origins of the feudal system was born out of the need to explain those anachronisms that persisted in Scottish law and Scottish manners. The 'barbarian invasion' which the burghers of Edinburgh witnessed in 1745 drove home in the most painful fashion that Scotland had been only imperfectly civilised and that the possibility

⁵¹ 'He has at Heart to raise a Spirit in his Countrymen, of searching into their Antiquities, those especially which regard the Law and the Constitution; being seriously convinced, that nothing will more contribute than this Study, to eradicate a Set of Opinions, which, by Intervals, have disquieted this Island for a Century and a Half. If these Papers have the Effect intended, it is well: If not, they may at least serve to bear Testimony of some Degree of Firmness in the Author, who, amidst the Calamities of a Civil War, gave not over his Country for lost; but trusting to a good Cause, and to good Dispositions in the Bulk of his Countrymen, was able to compose his Mind to Study, and to deal in Speculations, which are not relished, but in Times of the greatest Tranquillity'. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays Upon Several Subjects Concerning British Antiquities*, (Bristol, 1993), unpaginated introduction.

⁵² 'Jurisprudence is the theory of the rules by which civil governments ought to be directed. It attempts to shew the foundation of the different systems of government in different countries and to shew how far they are founded in reason.' A. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein (Indianapolis, 1982), p. 5.

of improvement required understanding why this was so. The science of historical jurisprudence as practised by the Scots could thus be seen, in part, as the intellectual wing of the S.S.P.C.K.

Robertson began his review by remarking that while some aspects of law were universal, others were demonstrably specific to their cultural and political origin. 'There is not a greater difference between two beings of a contrary species,' Robertson claimed, 'than there is between a man considered as a member of a *Grecian commonwealth*, of a *feudal kingdom*, or of a *despotic monarchy* . . . Laws made for men in such opposite situations must differ as much as if they were framed not for the same beings.'

Robertson was making the Montesquieuian point that laws should be in keeping with the spirit of the society that produced them. Kames, however, had pushed the historical aspect of Montesquieu's thought much farther in arguing that changes in the nature of civil institutions were the by-product of changes in social formation as a response to need.⁵³ Robertson proceeded to narrate briefly the trajectory of this development:

Men, in their progress from their first savage state, have passed through many and successive stages of refinement. They united, perhaps, very easily, as *hunters*, and subsisted like the Indians in America upon the game which they caught. The *pastoral state*, of which we have still an example among the Tartars, was probably next to that; and may be considered as a great step beyond the former, towards the perfection of society. Then followed the *state of agriculture*, such as subsisted among the first Romans. Lastly, *commerce* was introduced and extended; great cities were erected; the arts and sciences, with all their train of elegance, luxury, and refinement, made their appearance. How different from each other must be the wants, the desires, and the passions of men accustomed to such various forms of society? How few and simple the regulations of law in the *first state*? How numerous and complicated the last? How powerfully must the genius of every particular form influence the spirit of the laws which are peculiar to it? How different, for instance, the regulations with regard to property, which take place among a society which subsist by hunting, from those which would be proper in a society of shepherds, of husbandmen, or of merchants? Nor is the spirit of laws influenced only by such great variations in the form of government. It is possible to trace the effects of

⁵³ The vexed and probably unanswerable question of the exact extent of Kames' – as well as David Dalrymple's – reliance upon Adam Smith's Edinburgh lectures of the early 1750's in their development of Montesquieu lies beyond the scope of the present chapter. There is no fully satisfactory study of this issue, but see R. L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 98-130.

slighter and more imperceptible changes in a constitution, though it requires greater attention and acuteness to discern them.⁵⁴

This was a projectus for a sophisticated science of society, and Robertson thus felt that the study of jurisprudence had clearly developed beyond the capacity of the 'practical lawyer' to cope. Robertson stated that no one 'but a sound philosopher, or a well informed historian' should undertake an historical jurisprudence attentive to the complex interplay of law, history, and manners. No commentary on the progress of the science of jurisprudence in the early modern period was immune from Whiggish complacency, the practice of lambasting past error while extolling present insight, and Robertson himself was hardly immune. He lamented that the study of law had been so long left to lawyers devoid of historical or philosophical training, but suggested that thanks to Kames, that unhappy situation had at last been rectified.

The character of Robertson's histories would be profoundly shaped by the agenda of the Edinburgh intelligentsia, as well as by the political and religious developments of the period. The contemporary reorientation of natural jurisprudence towards the study of the progress of civilisation would particularly inform Robertson's vision of philosophical history as the 'history of the human mind.' However the most important external influence on Robertson's choice of historical topic had yet to come, one that would throw into sharper relief the political obstacles to the vision of polite, stoic and cosmopolitan modernity that Robertson embodied. This was the upheaval caused to the international state system and to Britain's commercial empire brought about by the Seven Years War, and to this we now turn.

⁵⁴ W. Robertson, 'Review of Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Historical Law Tracts*, 1759,' in *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, in *Works*, pp. 96-7. Cf. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Historical Law Tracts*, (Edinburgh, 1758), I, 77.

Chapter Four: Charles V and origins of the balance of Europe

Part I: Robertson and the Seven Years War

The previous chapter attempted to explore themes in the historiography of David Hume of relevance to the Robertsonian *oeuvre*, namely the establishment of a European states system, the role of superstition, enthusiasm, and priestcraft in an age of confessional war, the role of Britain as arbiter of the European balance of power, and the establishment of European empire in the New World. It has been advanced that key to understanding the intellectual, as well as the polemical thrust of Hume's pronouncements in these areas was Hume's own position as a keen and prominent observer of the politics of his day, particularly in his understanding of the implications of Britain's struggle for military and economic hegemony over France throughout the world. The present chapter will address these themes in Robertson's first mature work, his *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*. It will be advanced that Robertson, no less than Hume, positioned his historiography as counsel to the statesmen of his day, and that specifically, Britain's 'Machiavellian moment' following her overwhelming successes in the Seven Years War provided the matrix of problems that informed Robertson's history of the international order. In its own more moderate, less incendiary fashion, *Charles V* emerges as a text as probing and subversive of the tenets of conventional Whiggery as had Hume's own history.

Any discussion of *Charles V* must first address the question of subject matter.

That the author of the surprise sensation *The History of Scotland* should next have turned his attention to the reign of Charles V raised the curious eyebrow of many a

contemporary, and still can seem a counter-intuitive choice, particularly in the face of much contrary advice.

It is not clear that Charles V, *per se*, was Robertson's first choice as a subject. In a reply to a query raised in a letter from Robertson in 1759, David Hume informed the newly fêted historian that Thomas Warton not only had not, but also probably would not, ever begin his projected *Age of Leo X*. Hume understood that in saying so he was indicating the ground was clear for Robertson to tackle the same project without fear of competition. This he was disinclined to do, as he felt Robertson lacked the necessary background. 'How can you acquire Knowlegde of the great Works of Sculpture, Architecture, Painting, by which that Age was chiefly distinguished?' Hume asked. 'Are you versd in all the Anecdotes of the Italian Literature? These Questions I heard proposed in a Company of Literati, when I enquird concerning this Design of Warton. They applied their Remarks to that Gentleman, who yet, they say, has traveld. I wish they do not all of them fall more fully on you.'¹ Hume clearly believed that for all his success, Robertson remained a bit of a provincial.

On the surface, Hume was entirely correct; Robertson had no particularly detailed knowledge of sixteenth-century art or of continental sources. Indeed, Robertson, throughout his career, was to write relatively little about the progress of art for arts sake. Further, as will be noted below, Robertson was far from intimate with much foreign scholarship on the subject. It is questionable, however, whether Hume fully comprehended the type of project Robertson began to conceive. Perhaps Hume, following the proposed title, understood Warton's project as an attempt do for the early sixteenth century what Voltaire had done for the late seventeenth, namely to provide an

¹ *Letters of David Hume*, p. 46.

historical narrative of a political reign whose glory seemed to sum up an age of glittering cultural achievement. In short, it was an understandably abandoned project that Robertson, for all his talent and ambition, was ill positioned himself to take on. Hume suggested he would be better off to attempt a history of ancient Greece, as the popular French historian Rollin did not provide much serious competition.

Robertson does not seem to have placed any great stock in Hume's proposal. Nor was he much interested in Hume's second suggestion, that he write short potted biographies of modern political characters in the manner of Plutarch. Nor did Robertson take up his fellow Moderate John Jardine's mischievous call for a biography of Oliver Cromwell compiled entirely from foreign sources, which would proudly boast to contain not one true sentence. One suggestion that Robertson was forced to take very seriously indeed, however, and one put to him with some force and persistence, was for a new history of England. The story of how Robertson ruminated over then rejected the English history commission has been told before.² Of interest here is how the commission reflected the historian's rapid rise in reputation and prominence, both in literary and in political circles, and how this in turn affected the nature of the history he was to compose. John Blair, antiquarian and chaplain to the Princess-dowager of Wales first suggested that Robertson should follow up his *Scotland* with a new history of England. Blair's proximity to those in power left him well placed to assist in the distribution of copies of the work prior to publication as presents to those capable of ensuring positive word of mouth advertising, and to report reporting the good news back to the author. Blair sensed

² Most recently in Jeffrey Smitten, 'Introduction' *The Collected Works of William Robertson* (Bristol 1997)

an opportunity. It would be foolish to think there could ever be a gap in the market for English history.

I must confess the Reasons you give for declining the History of England are by no means sufficient, or at least satisfactory to me. For you must consider that this is a favorite Subject to every Englishman, Even wretched and contemptible Performances on this Subject meet with astounding Encouragement & their Number does not lessen the thirst of Purchasers, Mr Hume with all his merit is liable to many Exceptions & as long as he lives will never be in possession of the general approbation of the Publick, which is a Situation you have all the reason in the world to expect, nay I might venture to say that a very little application to the Ministry might perhaps procure you a settled Income to enable you to undertake that Task as necessary for the purchasing Books & the Expence of copying Papers wherever they are to be found.³

Blair was not alone in seeking to advance Robertson at the expense of Hume. That the most polite, up-to-date, philosophically sophisticated history of England seemed to be little more than a multi-volume calculated insult to revealed religion clearly remained something of scandal to many members of the English establishment.⁴ In a subsequent letter Blair claimed that Lord Chesterfield was so convinced of the superiority of Robertson to Hume as an historian that he would personally attempt to push a motion through the Lords providing Robertson with the financial means to accomplish such a grand enterprise. While such appeals to Robertson's sense of personal interest had not proved sufficient, Robertson's would-be patrons had other means of persuasion. Blair had previously boasted to Robertson that every member of the royal family had received a copy of *The History of Scotland*, and that Prince Edward had taken a particular delight in the work. Another 'Westminster Scot', the ninth Baron Cathcart, a *protégé* of the Duke of Cumberland and recently raised to the post of lieutenant general, was an intimate

³ J. Blair to Robertson, NLS 3942, ff 21-22.

⁴ The most persistently virulent criticisms of Hume's *History* were as much religious as political in character. For an extended early example, see Daniel MacQueen *Letters on Hume's History of Great Britain*, (Bristol, 1990). For a recent discussion of the *History's* British reception, see Philip Hicks, *Neo-classical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (London, 1996) pp. 193-201.

of the newly installed Lord Bute, and thus, an intimate once removed of the new King, George III. Cathcart again let it be known to Robertson that the historian's future prospects were very much on the table, and that his efforts had indeed received a favourable royal notice. As Cathcart wrote to Robertson,

Upon the Reception your Name would not fail to be mentioned, and I have the Pleasure to assure you that you have the Lordship's esteem good esteem and good Wishes, and every light in which you can consider yourself, in as great a Degree as you can desire. He told me the King's Thoughts as well as his own with regard to your History of Scotland, and a Wish his Majesty had espoused to see a History of England by your Pen. His Lordship assured me every Source of Information which Government can command would be opened to you, and that great Laborious and extensive as the Work must be, he would take Care your encouragement should be proportioned to it.⁵

Such a history, Cathcart clearly hoped, would render that of Hume largely redundant. Not all of Robertson's patrons sought to exploit Robertson's competitive ambition quite so nakedly. Robertson's principal supporter in the Commons, Gilbert Elliot, possessed a keener understanding of the complex personal and intellectual relationships between the Edinburgh literati, and knew better than Blair how little Robertson relished any full-blown *Querrelle entre les Humistes et les Robertsonistes*. Hume himself was aware of the possibility, and had taken steps to pre-emptively congratulate Robertson for his generosity of spirit in avoiding any such publicity-seeking temptations. Elliot, for his own part, merely argued that the resultant work would undoubtedly be so very different from Hume's work that the two would not truly be in competition. It is not possible to ascribe to a single cause why Robertson ultimately declined the commission. We know he was concerned about writing under the shadow of Hume, who he no doubt genuinely wished not to offend or follow too closely. We also know that he had little relish for extended absences from Edinburgh, which was the locus of his social, professional, and

⁵ Cathcart to Robertson, July 1761, NLS MSS 3942, ff 40-41.

political life. Whatever the final calculus, Robertson could congratulate himself, as he was to congratulate his sovereign, for the possession of 'such self-command, and maturity of judgment, as to set bound to his own triumphs, and to prefer the blessings of peace to the splendour of glory.'⁶

Whatever the case, the general assumption that Robertson would naturally turn to English history was a misreading of Robertson by his contemporaries. It would also be a misreading of Robertson's intentions to parallel too closely the historiographic purpose of *Charles V* with that of Hume's own *History of England*. Hume's *History* was a response, in large part, to what he considered the barbarous state of English letters, and the particularly barbarous state of English historiography. There is no evidence to suggest that Robertson held the historiography of sixteenth-century Europe in a similar contempt as Hume did his predecessors. Robertson had not studied the general history of Europe in the sixteenth century in any depth since his student days with Charles Mackie, and he lacked at this point a specialist's intimacy with the relevant historiography. That relative ignorance is revealed through Robertson's contacts with the prominent antiquary, the Reverend Thomas Birch, Secretary of the Royal Society from 1752 to 1765. Birch had attended Marischal College, Aberdeen, and had retained Scottish contacts, which included such friends of Robertson's as David Dalrymple and Dr. Davidson. Robertson began his correspondence with Birch in September 1757 with a short letter of introduction, both for himself and his yet to be completed *History of Scotland*, in which the historian offered reciprocal aid in tracking down collections of documents. The then minister of Gladsmuir, unable to spare the time and cost necessary for lengthy research

⁶ The words are those of Robertson, dedicating his *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* to King George III. *Works*, III, p. a3.

travel, had considerable need for such well-placed contacts. The contact proved highly fruitful, with Birch a useful fact-checker, and an even more important introduction to others such as the second Lord Hardwicke, with whom Robertson also exchanged scholarly favours. When Robertson revealed his projected plan to Birch, he requested from him a list of relevant books on the subject, on the grounds that 'your knowledge in this regard is far the superior of my own.' Birch duly replied with a copious list of Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian language texts, the vast majority of which Robertson made use of in his researches. Robertson, in effect, acquainted himself with the bulk of his secondary sources only after his subject had been chosen.

A better indication of Robertson's thinking was provided in a letter to Horace Walpole, in which Robertson revealed his own infectious enthusiasm for the period, as well as the organisational usefulness of a focus on the reign of Charles. It was not Charles' character, but his situation, that fascinated. 'The Emperor Charles V', Robertson explained,

though neither the most pleasant nor the most perfect character of that age, is on account of the extent of his dominions, and the length of his reign, the most proper person for occupying this capital place. I have therefore some thoughts of writing the history of his reign. The events are great and interesting. The struggle of the Spanish *cortes* for their liberty; the Reformation in Germany; the wars in Italy; the revival of letters; the conquest of the new world; the rise of the piratical states in Barbary, and the Emperor's expedition against them; his wars with the Turks; the rivalry between Charles and Francis; their intrigues with Henry VIII, are all splendid objects in history. The inferior characters too are good, Leo X, Luther, the Constable Bourbon, the marquis de Pescara, etc., are pleasant or (which is as lucky for an historian) strange figures. The field is wide and I shall have many books to read, but as I shall not be plagued with the endless controversies which perplexed me in my last work, I am not dismayed at mere labour. Allow me to ask the favour that you would bestow an hour upon me; that you would consider this plan, and give me your opinion how far it is possible to render this subject useful and interesting. If you think of any other subject that would be more proper for me to attempt, I shall esteem it an important addition to your

former favours, if you will take the trouble of writing me concerning it.⁷

In short, the opening of the sixteenth century was littered with important and interesting events, and if Charles himself was not the most dignified of subjects, the centrality of his position in so many of the great set pieces of the age rendered his reign a useful fulcrum in the organisation of a compelling narrative. It may seem naive on Robertson's part to presume that the historiography of sixteenth-century Europe contained none of the controversy of sixteenth-century Scotland. It was unlikely that Robertson thought none existed, more that such incidental controversies did not particularly engage him, and were not his primary reason for interest in the topic. Walpole was sceptical, preferring a history of Greece. Hume, who had likewise suggested that topic, felt the need to progress to a more advanced criticism of the project.

I own, I like still less your Project of the Age of Charles V. That Subject is disjointed; & your Hero, who is the sole Connexion, is not very interesting. A competent Knowledge, at least, is required of the State & Constitution of the Empire, of the several Kingdoms of Spain, of Italy, of the Low Countries; which it would be the Work of half a Life to acquire. And tho' some Parts of the Story may be entertaining, there would be many dry & barren, and the whole seems not to have any great Charms.⁸

For Hume, Charles was simply not a suitable character for such a project, and such a work ran the risk of immense tedium. Hume was certainly in a position to know, having himself addressed sixteenth-century European affairs at great length in his own Tudor volumes. Yet tellingly, this time Hume's scepticism was focused as much on the subject's lack of literary interest as on Robertson's lack of qualification. Yet Robertson was, if anything, spurred on by Hume's criticism. The historian had in the meantime

⁷ Robertson to Horace Walpole, 20 February, 1759. W. S. Lewis (ed.) *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, Vol. 15 (London, 1952), pp. 55-56.

⁸ Hume to Robertson, 1759. J. Y. T. Grieg, (ed.) *The Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 1932), vol. I, p. 315.

developed a far more ambitious conception of the potential import of his work. In a letter to Lord Hardwicke in January 1760 Robertson wrote:

I have ventured to undertake the History of the Emperor Charles V, whose reign contains the opening of modern History, and the establishment of the present systems of policy, laws, manners and religion in Europe. I shall do everything in my power to render it worthy of the publick attention, though I must execute it more slowly, and perhaps, more imperfectly, than if I were in a situation which allowed me more hours of leisure.⁹

This was something altogether grander and more engaged than a proposal for an interesting story well told, it was self consciously the project of a man of affairs. Only the most innocent political observer could have been unaware of the totemic figure Charles cut in contemporary discourse, and political innocence did not number among the many charges levelled at Robertson over his long career.

To understand how the young minister might have conceived a history of the reign of the emperor Charles V as the establishment of the present system of policy, laws, and manners, it is useful to turn our attention to the contemporary state of the policy Robertson believed his reign had introduced. As discussed earlier, British foreign policy had already produced its own legitimating discourse concerning the continuity of its purposes and aims. This was the history of Britain's providential custodianship of the scales of balance in Europe against the threat of Popish universal monarchy. The European narrative of universal monarchy began with the attempt of Charles V to crush the Reformation and 'give law' to all Europe. According to this view, Charles' ambition was passed onto his son, whose attempts to conquer and re-catholicise Britain and the Netherlands were thwarted only by the providential wisdom and strength of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth was refashioned, by Whig pens, into the emblem of the English sovereign who

⁹ Robertson to Hardwicke, 19 January 1760. BL 35350, ff 58-59.

correctly accepted her providential role as protector and saviour of Europe and the Protestant religion. The official history of the balance of power was every inch as totemic, mythopoetic, and altogether Whiggish as the domestic history of the ancient constitution. Yet, more fundamentally, it was no less an argument from history, and the doctrine's historicity lent it a flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances. It will be argued that Robertson in his *Charles V* engaged with this historical paradigm, in a distinct yet comparable way as Hume had grappled with the parallel doctrine of the ancient constitution.

Just as it is a caricature to present all Whiggery with which the Edinburgh literati disagreed as statically and monolithically 'vulgar', so it would be a serious distortion to view Whig rhetoric concerning the balance of power as incapable of adapting itself to changing geo-political circumstances. British balance of power discourse emerged within the context of the European wars of religion, and never entirely shed its confessional charge. In the seventeenth century, balance of power discourse became entangled with the jealousy of trade, and remained at its most powerful when confessional and commercial conflict could be presented as flip sides of a single contested coin. Within the context of post-Utrecht Europe, however, considerations of the European balance became inextricably linked with economic competition in the New World. As with the rhetoric of the ancient constitution, British discourse concerning the balance of power is deprived of most of its meaning if divorced from the reality of bi-polar conflict with France. Just as the story of the rise and progress of French despotism had long served as an antithesis to the story of the matchless constitution, so the economic, military, and religious belligerence of a French empire of conquest and

expansion provided the foil for a British empire of commerce and preservation. Perhaps paradoxically, the very adaptability of balance of power discourse kept the image of Charles as the fount of the ambition to universal monarchy surprisingly salient.

The natural forum of balance of power politics was the debate over the conduct of war. It would be highly counter-intuitive that *Charles V*, a text whose theme was the origins of European balance, was not informed by the war fought under that very banner at the time Robertson was casting about for ideas, that is the Seven Years War of 1756-1763. The war, as had all wars of the eighteenth century, had reintroduced the figure of Charles into the historical debate over foreign policy. Hostilities with France commenced with a relatively minor incident, the taking of two British ships in July 1755. The official British response was livid. France had acted 'in contempt of the laws of nations, the faith of treaties, the usages established among civilized nations, and the regard they owe to each other'.¹⁰ 'The same motive of self defense hath forced the King to seize the French ships and sailors, in order to deprive the court of France of the means of making a descent, with which their ministers in all the courts of Europe have menaced England.'¹¹ By March the court leaked worries of a possible French invasion. On 17 May, 1756, the crown made an official declaration of war, citing the 'ambitious views' of France now operating without 'regard to the most solemn treaties and engagements.'¹² The following month saw a parallel declaration from Versailles, also couched in the language of international law. Britain herself had adopted a belligerent stance 'in contempt of the law of nations, and the faith of treaties.' Versailles effectively accused Britain of behaving as if the law of nations only applied in Europe.

¹⁰ *Scots Magazine*, Jan 1756, p. 43.

¹¹ *Scots Magazine*, Feb 1756, p. 81.

¹² *Scots Magazine*, May 1756, p. 37.

Whilst the French soldiers and sailors were treated with the greatest severity in the British islands, and, with respect to them, the bounds which the law of nature, and the common principles of humanity, have set to the most rigorous rights of war, were violated; the English travelled and resided freely in France, under the protection of that regard which civilized people reciprocally owe to each other.¹³

This Anglo-French maritime dispute was never likely to remain a localised issue, particularly in that it coincided with the instability resultant from the Diplomatic Revolution, the successful *coup* of Count Kaunitz of Austria to reverse hundreds of years of Habsburg strategic thinking, and join into a defensive alliance with France against Frederick II's Prussia. At a stroke, the 'Utrecht system' was rendered a dead letter. This necessitated something of a sea change in Britain's German policy. No longer was the house of Austria the bulwark against Bourbon aggression – it had not effectively been so for some time – it was now a hostile force. This in turn transformed Prussia into an ally.¹⁴ Crucially, these developments had the effect of intensifying the confessional nature of the balance of alliances, with the European states now for the first time divided neatly into Protestant and Catholic blocs. Not all were convinced that a Prussian entanglement was wise. One opposition MP worried that 'the balance of power at land, that plausible pretence formerly made use of, for involving us in expensive alliances and bloody wars, does not now seem to be in any danger.'¹⁵ Such sentiments produced many vitriolic rejoinders from the Whig supporters of continental measures, who extolled such treaties as the basic test of the sociability of nations.

¹³ *Scots Magazine*, June 1756, p. 290.

¹⁴ D. B. Horn 'The Diplomatic Revolution' in J. O. Lindsay (ed), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. VII: *The Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1963) pp. 440-464.

¹⁵ *Scots Magazine*, June 1756, p. 293.

We know from the testimony of John Erskine that Robertson was a keen follower of parliamentary debates.¹⁶ Robertson, during his 1759 trip to London, had been able personally to attend a number of debates, where he was able to witness first hand the effects of the heated rhetoric of the war's principal apologist and architect, the Secretary of State William Pitt. 'What great things have I to say of Mr. Pitt,' Robertson drolly intoned, 'who yesterday brought all Tories to approve of continental measures as the only thing for the good of old England!'

The War became increasingly controversial as a minor stand-off in the colonies became enmeshed in a continental war at root a conflict between a newly ascendant Prussia and a declining Habsburg Empire. Many Tories already suspicious of the depth of dedication of the house of Hanover to British interests felt Britain was being drawn into conflict for local German reasons.¹⁷ The war raised additional anxieties within a Scottish context. Scottish troops contributed disproportionately to the war effort, and local discourse ruminated nervously over the dangers of depopulation and potential invasion. This in turn gave particular resonance to the clamour for a Scottish militia, which was desired for reasons as much practical as psycho-political.¹⁸

Scottish periodicals took a keen interest in the conflict. Indeed, periodicals provided a better indication of the direction of contemporary discourse on the balance of power took than any re-publication of older, semi-canonical treatises on the subject. Additionally, there was a blurred line between journalism and historiography. Not only

¹⁶ In arguing that the debates over Robert Walpole's administration were crucial in helping to form the sensibilities of Robertson's circle, Erskine wrote that 'the speeches of Argyle, Carteret, Chesterfield, Walpole, Pultney, Littleton, Polwarth, and others, in both houses of Parliament, were read with avidity; and many a younger reader caught their manly animated manner'. J. Erskine 'Appendix to the Sermon: The Agency of God in Human Greatness', in J. Smitten (ed) *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 268.

¹⁷ R. Pares, 'American versus Continental Warfare, 1739-63', *The English Historical Review*, 51 (1936), pp. 436-437.

¹⁸ J. Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh, 1985), chapter four.

did coverage of current affairs focus on the same sort of war and diplomacy as did literary productions covering more remote events, but the two forms of writing shared the common name of 'history'. *The Scots Magazine* in particular covered the war extensively, cobbling together materials from other Edinburgh and London periodicals, publishing original correspondence, and often reproducing parliamentary speeches in their entirety. One such speech, that of one of Robertson's warmest supporters in the Lords, the Earl of Chesterfield, merits quotation at length, both because it illustrated the views of one of the historian's most prominent English patrons, and because it placed the present conflict in its full politico-mythological context. In doing so, Chesterfield's oration further illustrated how parliamentary debates concerning the war was conducted on both sides within the paradigm of the balance of power. He did not doubt that the question of balance lay at the heart of the present conflict.

Our joining in a way upon the continent for preserving the balance of power, may sometimes be wise and necessary. . . One sole monarch of Europe might soon render himself master of this island, because he would be superior to us at sea. By sole monarch, Sir, I do not mean his being in actual possession of every kingdom and state upon the continent of Europe; but his being in possession of so much power and so great riches, as to give the law to all the rest, by menacing the nearest, and bribing, or in modern language, *subsidizing* the most remote. And whether the monarch of France might not soon become such a monarch, if this nation should lay aside all regard for the balance of power, I hope your Lordships will seriously consider.

While modern circumstances may well have rendered permanent territorial conquest unlikely, the orientation of Bourbon ambition towards a universal dominance could be taken as given. Chesterfield further assumed that any such explosion of aggressive behaviour by the French threw the balance between states into disarray, a situation that could only be rectified through the concerted action of the British state. The history of Europe both told and validated such a role for Britain. At this point Chesterfield solemnly invoked the history of Britain's special relationship with the balance of Europe.

Chesterfield began this story in the customary fashion by invoking the novel aspirations of the Emperor Charles V:

The present, Sir, Is not the first time that such a design has been formed.
The house of Austria attempted it in the reign of Charles V.; and he would have accomplished it had it not been for the wisdom and vigour of Francis II. His dividing his power, and afterwards resigning his crown, put an end to any such design in the house of Austria.

This was not a preview of the seventeenth century likely to be shared by German Protestants or their Whig sympathisers, nor did it provide a view of Charles and Francis with which Robertson was to have much sympathy. In the traditional narrative, such as expressed here by Lord Chesterfield, Britain only fully took up her providential role as defender of the balance, and thus of international Protestantism, during the reign of the watchful and decisive Elizabeth. Charles V may have been personally thwarted, but his ambition lived on in the dark heart of his offspring.

...But his son, successor in Spain, Phillip II resumed the design; which our wise Queen Elizabeth quickly perceived; and notwithstanding her having much to do at home, she soon took proper measures to defeat it. For this purpose, she did not hesitate for a moment upon engaging in a war on the continent, and by assisting the Protestants in France, against the Spanish faction in that kingdom; afterwards supporting the malcontents in the Netherlands, against the King of Spain, their then sovereign.

Chesterfield followed convention by relating the *translatio tyrannae* from Spain to France. However, disastrously for the European balance, the long constitutional struggle within the three British kingdoms had rendered English policy ineffective. Perhaps the strongest accusation a staunch Whig could level at the house of Stuart was that its negligence had allowed French power to expand unchecked. As Chesterfield put it,

Upon the decline of the power of Spain, the power of France rose apace; so that even Cardinal Richelieu began to form the design of making the King of France monarch of Europe. Our Charles I did something against it, but he did nothing in the right way; and by his aiming so openly at absolute

power at home, he rendered himself unable to oppose any foreign design, or to support himself upon the throne. His immediate successor Oliver Cromwell was indeed a usurper; but he was a man of sense, and great cunning: for by not seeming to aim at it, he got what Charles lost both his crown and his life for, by too open aiming at it. He indeed for his own glory, and the good of his country, joined at first with France against Spain; but it is thought, that before his death he began to think of joining in a confederacy against France. Whereas Charles II instead of endeavouring to preserve the balance of power, became himself a pensioner of France; and was never right but once, I mean when he entered into the triple alliance. But he soon became sorry for it; and I am sorry to say, that through his whole reign he seems to have been an enemy to his country, a friend to his most dangerous enemies. His brother and successor again lost his crown by refusing to join in a war against Lewis XIV.; for indeed both the brothers seemed successively to desire only to be the delegate tyrant of these kingdoms, under the supreme tyrant of Versailles.

This was the central contention of the Whig version of the history of foreign affairs. English monarchs who neglected the European balance did not long keep their thrones. Closely following the traditional narrative, Chesterfield continued that with the Revolution of 1688 England regained her providential role.

After them, by good luck, or rather by a remarkable providence, we got a sovereign who had some regard to the liberties of Europe, as well as the liberties of this country. The Prince of Orange, from the moment he got the better of the French party in Holland; for it is now evident, that those who in that country called themselves republicans, and were thought to be so by the deluded populace, were all in the interest, and some of them perhaps in the pay of France. But the Prince of Orange, by his own address, and the contempt which the French court in all their measures shewed for the Dutch, got at last the better of the French pensioners in England, as well as Holland; and the last of the many great actions of his life was, the concluding of the grand alliance, which, under the wise conduct of the Duke of Marlborough, put an end to the ambitious views of France, and prevented them being renewed, until we fatally took it into our heads, that the overgrown power of Austria was becoming dangerous to the liberties of Europe.

Only at this point did the subversive thrust of Chesterfield's remarks become clear. The process of becoming tied to events on the continent, particularly with the controversial treaty with Prussia, Britain had taken her eye off the true threat to the European balance – the growth of a French overseas empire.

I say upon ourselves Sir; because by an attack upon our trade and plantations in America, the balance of power in Europe may now be irrevocably overturned. The power of France by land is now become so much superior to that of any of

her neighbours, that is to say, to all those they can immediately attack by land: so that now they want nothing for rendering their monarch the sole monarch of Europe, but money enough to bribe some of those powers that are at a distance; and this they will get, if they can possess themselves of our trade and plantations, for this will not only increase their fund for bribing, but put it out of our power to bribe against them.¹⁹

For Chesterfield, then, French trade served her continental ambition. Britain's preferred method of continental engagement, granting large subsidies to allies, threatened to become ineffectual if France were to substantially augment her capacity to counter-subsidise. The most salient aspect of the present war, for men such as Chesterfield, was imperial competition pursued for continental purposes. The European balance had never been more precarious.

Such views were by no means universal north of the Tweed. Despite the bullish intervention in favour of Pitt and his measures made by Robertson's fellow moderate Alexander Carlyle, the Scottish Kirk had been ambivalent in its support for the war in the difficult early stages. A General Assembly address from 1759 had been pointedly critical of the conduct of the German war. When the General Assembly next addressed its sovereign on the subject of the war, Robertson himself wrote the text. Much had transpired between the two addresses. George III had succeeded his grandfather, and as a result, the Earl of Bute succeeded Pitt as prime minister. The new monarch had inherited a war he was keen to be rid of, both for its expense and the increasingly unrealistic prospect of attaining substantially better terms from France. Britain had made spectacular gains against the French in Canada, and stood to gain little by continuing the conflict. The resultant Treaty of Paris was seen by staunch Whigs as a betrayal, however, and became the stick with which to beat the increasingly unpopular ministry of Lord Bute, who was soon forced to resign. The treaty also became a stick with which to beat

¹⁹ *Scots Magazine*, May 1757, pp 289-31.

the entire Scottish nation, as John Wilkes endlessly lambasted the traitorous treaty and the enemies of English liberty who had conceived it. Robertson, in contrast, was keen to emphasise the Scottish Kirk's support for a British monarch who acted to further the common good of all his subjects:

We thankfully ascribe the Return of the inestimable Benefits of Peace to the Blessing of divine Providence, upon the Wisdom and Steadiness with which your Majesty hath carried on the Negotiations for that salutary Purpose; and of great Importance to your Crown, which far exceed the most sanguine Expectations of your Subjects at the Commencement of the War, and are fully adequate to the great Success of the *British Arms*, it hath been, and shall be our Care at this Juncture, to instil into the Minds of our People proper Sentiments of Gratitude towards your Majesty, and of Thankfulness to Almighty GOD, whose Hand they discern and bless in the Conduct of this great Event.²⁰

In his support for a comprehensive peace ending the conflict of the Seven Years War, George III had proven himself a model stoical monarch. Robertson flattered the king further in lauding his ability to discern the true British interest through this difficult period:

After a long War, the most extensive, and the most successful, but, at the same Time, most burthensome ever carried on by *Great Britain*, Peace became a desirable Object to a Nation whose Wealth and Power are derived from its Commerce. Your Majesty, undazzled by the Splendour of continual Victories, and always attentive to the true Interest of your People, took early Measures for procuring this necessary Blessing; and your Magnanimity and Steadiness have accomplished salutary Work which your Wisdom and Humanity prompted you to undertake. By a definitive Treaty with your Enemies, the great Objects for which War was undertaken are attained; the Possessions of chief Consequence to *Britain* are secured, new Sources of Commerce are opened; and Territories are added to your Crown, more extensive and of greater Value, than have been acquired by any Nation since the Division of *Europe* into great Kingdoms, and the Establishment of a Balance of Power, have put a Stop to the Rapidity of Conquest; and as your Majesty can now turn your whole Attention towards the Cultivation and Encouragement of Arts of Peace, which, even under the Pressure, and amidst the Avocations of War, you did not neglect, these, under your royal Patronage, must revive and flourish, and *Britain*, as it is the greatest, will become the most polished and illustrious nation in Europe.

²⁰ W. Robertson, 'General Assembly Address, 1763' in *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, ed. J. Smitten, p. 116.

In saying as much, Robertson placed himself squarely against the populist Whig criticism of the treaty as a betrayal. The historian implied that, on the contrary, the treaty had served as a necessary check on the potentially destabilising success of the British at the expense of the French. The timely peace had, hopefully, preserved the European balance and, just as fundamentally, allowed Britain at last to refocus her imperial energies on more worthwhile projects. And no project was dearer to the heart of the Kirk than the propagation of Christian Knowledge. 'As the chief Obstacles which have hitherto prevented the Instruction of the *American Nations* are now removed,' Robertson wrote, 'we trust to your Majesty's known Zeal for promoting true Religion, and to the Blessing of the Almighty upon your Endeavours, that the People under your Dominion which know not GOD, shall at length receive the Knowledge of that Holy Faith, which civilizes and refines the Manners of Men, at the same time that it improves and sanctifies their Hearts'.²¹

That the fortunes of Robertson's choice of historical subject and that of British policy had by this time become firmly linked is now demonstrable through internal evidence; the preface of the text of *Charles V* seems to pick up where the General Assembly address had left off:

HISTORY claims it as her prerogative to offer instruction to *KINGS*, as well as to their people. What reflections the Reign of the Emperor *CHARLES V.* may suggest to your Majesty, it becomes not me to conjecture. But your Subjects cannot observe the various calamities, which that Monarch's ambition to be distinguished as a Conqueror, brought upon his dominions, without recalling the felicity of their own times, and looking up with gratitude to their Sovereign, who, during the fervour of youth, and amidst the career of victory, possessed such self-command, and maturity of judgement, as to set bounds to his own triumphs, and to prefer the blessings of peace to the splendour of military glory.²²

²¹ W. Robertson, 'General Assembly Address' *Miscellaneous Works*, pp. 118-119.

The judicious 'bound-setting' to which Robertson referred, clearly signified the limited territorial gains Great Britain reaped as a result of her victory over France in the Seven Years War.²³ Yet behind Robertson's endorsement of his sovereign's policy lie a none too concealed and distinctly subversive warning: any ruler, French or otherwise, who failed to subordinate glory to interest was likely to suffer the same fate as Charles.

²² W. Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (London, 1769) Vol. I.

²³ R. Sher, 'Charles V and the Book Trade' in S.J. Brown, (ed) *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*.

Part II: The Narrative of Charles' Reign

If the first great question facing any modern interpreter is the choice of subject, the second is the historiographical genre to which it made a contribution. Robertson expanded on both his message and the intended audience for that message in his Preface. In the first instance, he claimed, political history was the necessary subject of politicians. But if history was not to prove prohibitively time consuming, the man of affairs needed to be judicious in the selection of topics for study, choosing only those periods of truly general utility and interest.

It is necessary, then, not only for those who are called to conduct the affairs of nations, but such as inquire and reason concerning them, to remain satisfied with a general knowledge of distant events, and to confine their study of history in detail chiefly to that period, in which the several states of Europe having become intimately connected, the operations of one power are felt by all, as to regulate their measures.

This placed *Charles V* squarely within that historiographical mode popularised by Samuel Pufendorf, modern history as the training of statesmen. Yet while the *Einleitung*, Pufendorf's vehicle for instruction in the art of discerning true interest, took the form of disparate national narratives cobbled together between two covers, Robertson's own choice of subject allowed him to pursue the same end with more elegance, economy, and point.

Some boundary, then, ought to be fixed in order to separate these periods. An area should be pointed out, prior to which, each country, little connected with those around it, may trace its own history apart; after which, the transactions of every considerable nation in Europe became interesting and instructive to all. With this intention I undertook to write the history of Charles V.

It was during his administration that the powers of Europe were formed into one great political system, in which each took a station, wherein it has since remained with less variation, than could have been expected after the shocks occasioned by so many internal revolutions and so many foreign wars. The great events which happened then have not hitherto spent their force. The political principles and maxims, then established, still continue to operate. The ideas concerning the balance of power, then introduced or rendered general, still influence the councils of nations. The age of Charles V. may therefore be considered as the period which the political state of Europe began to assume a new form. I have endeavoured to render my account of it an introduction to the history of Europe subsequent to his Reign.²⁴

The modern diplomat required a history of modern diplomacy, and such a history only became possible as a result of Charles' reign. As presented in chapter two, Pufendorf's *Einleitung* presented modern statecraft as a series of decisions either rational or irrational to the extent that those decisions corresponded to true interest. Robertson's own *Einleitung* promised to go beyond Pufendorf, by transcending the calculus of correct versus incorrect notions of state interest through a history of the key interest of the states of Europe, the preservation of balance. In an important sense, *Charles V* was the history of an idea. Robertson's periodisation, taken on its own, was not controversial, and was consistent with the schema of European history presented in his earlier *The History of Scotland*, where he had stated that the evolution of Scottish history from its 'third' to 'fourth' phase, i.e., from relating transactions of purely local interest to one relating transactions of universal significance, had taken place in the first half of the sixteenth century, the age of Charles V and Francis I. With that in mind, a history of the Reign of Charles V could be presented as a logical continuation of a history of the Reigns of Mary

²⁴ *Charles*, I, preface.

Queen of Scots and James VI. The sixteenth century 'introduced' the history of modern Scotland precisely because it introduced the history of modern Europe. Yet the reign of Charles V required a history of history of a very different type than had Mary's'.

Robertson contrasted his own approach with that of his predecessors by writing that while 'his [Charles V's] numerous biographers describe his personal qualities and actions; while the historians of different countries relate occurrences the consequences of which were local or transient, *it has been my purpose to record only those great transactions in his reign, the effects of which were universal, Or continue to be permanent*'.²⁵ The statesman had little use for biography or local history, and Robertson set his own type of universal history in contrast to both.

Charles V was intended, then, as a turning away from the type of sentimental history of personal character exemplified by *The History of Scotland*, where Robertson's aim had been to engage with such biographers, particularly on the subject of the relative guilt of Mary. He further made clear that it was neither to be the civil history of any particular country, the transactions of which must always remain in some sense, parochial. His work, strictly speaking, was neither a history of Spain nor a history of the Habsburg Empire. *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* was a self consciously universal history of great transactions. To claim *Charles V* as a universal history of a particular sort is not, however, to presume the work was an exercise in the still popular model of Mosaic universal history that began with the Creation and ended in eschatology. There remained a classical model of how to narrate universality, a model more Polybian than Eusebian, which presented as foundational the narration of the rise of universal empires. As Polybius considered his *Rise of the Roman Republic* universal in

²⁵ *Ibid.*

that it rendered any treatment of earlier periods largely redundant, so *Charles V* would provide all the European history prior to his reign any statesmen was likely to require.

If *Charles V* can be read as an introduction to universal history, this does not imply that it was a history indifferent to the progress of national constitutions towards regularity and liberty. However, Robertson inverted the traditional historiographical paradigm regarding the relationship between domestic and foreign politics. He was less interested in how the preservation of the balance of power kept monarchs on their respective thrones as he was in how the rise of regular monarchies themselves led to the creation of a durable equilibrium. This difference in perspective, coupled with their obviously contrasting assessments of the role of religion in public life, led Robertson to post-date Hume's account of the emergence of this balance. David Hume had not argued that the balance of power in Europe began with the reign of Charles V; rather he had rehearsed the Guicciardinian trope of the balance of power as a settled aspect of the political landscape prior to the upheavals of sixteenth-century warfare. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hume had understood these wars as the result of the uniquely calamitous poisoning of statecraft by religious enthusiasm. Robertson was to turn Hume's analysis on its head and to portray the religious conflicts of Charles' reign as themselves productive of a stable balance that would later provide security for commerce.

Robertson was no less keen than Hume to stress that the Reign of the Emperor Charles V had commenced a new age of war. At first it seemed that Robertson, like Hume, would introduce these wars as a fateful fall from grace. He wrote that the death in 1519 of Maximilian, Charles' predecessor on the Imperial throne, 'broke that profound and universal peace which reigned in the Christian world; it excited a rivalry between

two princes, which threw all Europe into agitation, and kindled wars more general, and of longer duration, than had hitherto been known in modern times'.²⁶ Yet for Robertson that profound and unbroken peace had been more slumber than repose, and the events to follow had proven more constructive to the development of modern Europe than Hume had been prepared to acknowledge. In Robertson's mind, the accession of Charles as Emperor had revealed the unimproved nature of European statecraft. The Imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation had been Christendom's highest secular honour, and upon its vacancy, both Charles, King of Spain, from ambition, and Francis, King of France, from jealousy, had been eager to claim it as their own. So far as the peace of Europe was concerned, it had been evident that the success of either would have been disastrous. But the various rulers of Europe lacked either the power or the political understanding that would have enabled them to intervene:²⁷

Their common interest ought naturally to have formed a general combination, in order to disappoint both competitors, and to prevent either from obtaining such a pre-eminence in power and dignity, as might prove dangerous to the liberties of Europe. But the ideas with respect to the proper distribution and balance of power were so lately introduced into the system of European policy, that they were not hitherto objects of sufficient attention. The passions of some princes, the want of foresight in others, and fear of giving offence to the candidates, hindered such a salutary union of the powers of Europe, and rendered them either totally negligent of the publick safety, or kept them from exerting themselves with vigour in its behalf.²⁸

Henry VIII's behaviour had been particularly illuminating. England, by virtue of the relative strength of her position, should have been capable of preventing the imperial

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 48.

²⁷ J. Robertson is thus misleading when he claims that the jealousy of the princes of Europe displayed that a notion of the balance of power existed prior to Charles' reign, rendering his threat of universal monarchy chimerical. While Charles' ambition might have been dreaded, Robertson was keen to point out that the failure to prevent Charles' election demonstrated that a stable balance of power had yet to be achieved. Cf. J. Robertson, 'Gibbon and the Universal Monarchy of Rome' in R. McKitterick and R. Quinault, (eds) *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), p.259.

²⁸ *Charles V*, vol. II, p. 52.

crown from falling into dangerous hands, but Henry had proven far too capricious and tempestuous to perceive correctly his own interest or to take the appropriate measures. For reasons Robertson was to explain in his introduction the Pope alone had correctly understood what was at stake. Leo X had been 'the only prince of the age who observed the motions of the two contending monarchs with a prudent attention, or who discovered a proper solicitude for the public safety.'²⁹ Robertson emphasised that Leo's superior discernment had not sprung from superior virtue, as he had none, but rather from his world-weary cynicism.

This failure of statecraft on the part of Europe's rulers had meant that when the imperial crown fell to Charles, Europe would be plunged into a state of general conflict. Robertson explained that the elimination of faction and the development of regular government had transformed the way in which war was financed and conducted. Standing armies had greatly increased the cost of campaigns, and had transformed the art of war into 'a very intricate science' of protracted sieges.³⁰ However, there had been a distinction between the efficiency of the two kingdoms; Francis enjoyed an inestimable advantage against the new Emperor, as France could sustain a heavy tax-burden, while Spain and Germany could not. As a near-absolute monarch, Francis had been better able than Charles to increase royal revenue: 'Several new offices were created, and exposed to sale; the royal demenses were alienated; unusual taxes were imposed; and the tomb of St. Martin was stripped of a rail of massive silver, which Lewis XI., in one of his fits of devotion, had encircled it.'³¹ The relatively superior fiscal autonomy of the French

²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 54.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 199.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 149. This was an insight Robertson drew from Voltaire: 'To find resources for answering his purposes, and to enable him to undertake a second time the conquest of the dutchy of

crown was the decisive military asset *vis à vis* her rival. While Charles and Henry had required the approval of their legislatures to fund their armies, Francis had in contrast been able to quickly employ his own forces.³² Charles' position had been less favourable. Robertson reminded his readers that at that point the Spanish constitution had been in a period of transition; her cities had grown independent and jealous of their liberties, and her burgesses had been represented within the Cortés to check the power of the nobility. Spain at that time had been more urbanised than France, and her burgesses had been more resistant to paying exorbitant taxes. The citizens of Toledo had considered themselves guardians of ancient liberties, and had thus been particularly intransigent.³³ The result had been the Revolt of the *Comuneros* of 1520, in which representatives of the cities had listed their grievances and had proposed a set of remedies that would have ultimately resulted in limiting the power of the crown.

Robertson was intrigued by how the revolt had proven decisive in the completion of Charles' political education. Charles had proved capable of making the best of a weak hand through outmanoeuvring his political enemies, a talent he would ultimately employ to greater effect against Francis, and one that would allow him to compete with him as more than an equal. Robertson understood the revolt to have significance for European history generally, namely the clash of privilege and prerogative universal to European governments as they slowly and painfully shook off the feudal yoke.³⁴ Robertson was

Milan, at the very time when France was attacked on every side, the creation of twenty new employments in the law, and St Martin's silver grate, were insufficient. The King's demenses were alienated for the first time; the land tax, and other imposts were raised. This was a great advantage which the kings of France had over their neighbours; Charles V was not so despotic in any of his dominions: but his unhappy facility of exhausting the subject, was productive of several calamities to France.' Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe*, p. 190.

³² *Ibid.*, II., p. 190.

³³ *Charles*, II, p. 210

³⁴ 'As the feudal institutions in the several kingdoms of Europe were originally the same, the genius of

eager here to demonstrate the interconnectedness of British with European history, by hinting at the different lines along which British history might have developed had Britain possessed a monarch more prudent than Charles Stuart. Luckily for Charles the Junta overextended itself and offended the sense of entitlement among the nobility. There was ultimately no meeting of minds possible between the *comuneros* and the upper echelons of the nobility. Robertson emphasised that the lack of subordination among the perpetrators rendered them incapable of either effective organisation or of concerted action, and that, therefore, Charles had been able to divide and conquer. The King's success had precipitated a dramatic rupture in the history of the Spanish constitution; both the Cortés and the cities themselves had now forfeited much of their ancient liberty. Charles had gone some way towards rendering the Spanish crown absolute.³⁵

Charles' successful handling of the revolt may well have made him a tyrant in the eyes of those who sought to defend the old constitution, but he had become a tyrant free to pursue his dynastic ambitions abroad without fear of further civil unrest at home. Robertson pointed out, however, that depriving a state of its liberty was not sufficient to render it efficient. Charles had found it no easier to raise sufficient revenue after the junta, much to the detriment of his struggle against Francis. It ultimately mattered little that Charles had been the finer and more ambitious strategist or that he had possessed the

those governments which arose from them bore a strong resemblance to each other, and the regulations which the Castilians attempted to establish on this occasion, differ little from those which other nations have laboured to procure in their struggles with their monarchs for liberty. The grievances complained of, and the remedies proposed by the English commons in their contests with the house of Stuart, particularly resemble those upon which the Junta now insisted. But the principles of liberty seem to have been better understood, at this period, by the Castilians, than by any other people in Europe; they had acquired more liberal ideas with respect to their own rights and privileges; they had formed more bold and generous sentiments concerning government; and discovered an extent of political knowledge to which the English themselves did not attain until more than a century afterwards'. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 220-21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 239.

better trained of the two armies, for he could rarely pay them. The Imperial armies, while not in a state of open mutiny, had often been prevented from attaining their ends through running short of supplies at crucial moments. For Charles, rhetoric, address, and dissimulation had to suffice in lieu of funds; instead of payment, Charles had offered them a portion of the spoils of victory. The gambit had proved surprisingly successful in the short term, but Charles' armies, had now become 'the scourge of Europe' and a warning to all of the dangers of a tyrant with a mercenary army barely kept in check.³⁶

Robertson made the traditional point that the battle of Pavia in 1525 had turned the tide of the conflict between the two combatants. For Voltaire, the incident had been illustrative of the limitations of Charles' ambition; he had taken Francis prisoner only to release him, demonstrating in the Frenchman's mind the foolishness of imputing to him a desire for universal monarchy. Voltaire had naturally viewed the entire affair as something of a farce.³⁷ Robertson preferred to emphasise how others had perceived Charles' actions. At the same time the Scottish historian was keen to point out how the incident revealed the fatal flaw in Charles' statesmanship; his victory had been total, yet it had left him insatiate. 'Ambition, not generosity, was the ruling passion of his mind,' Robertson wrote, 'and the victory at Pavia opened such new and unbounded prospects for

³⁶ *Charles*, II., p. 225.

³⁷ 'Charles V had not as yet drawn his sword, when he had not only a king, but a hero, his prisoner at Madrid. He seems to have neglected, on this occasion, to improve his good fortune: for instead of marching into France, to reap the benefit of the victory obtained by his generals in Italy, he loses his time in Spain; instead of seizing at least on the Milanese for himself, he thinks proper to sell the investiture thereof of Francis Sforza, that he may not give too much umbrage to Italy. Henry VIII. instead of joining with him to dismember France, grows jealous of his greatness, and enters into a treaty with the regent. Upon the whole, the captivity of Francis I which ought naturally to have been followed by extraordinary revolutions, came to nothing more than this: the King was ransomed, contumelious language ensued; Charles and Francis gave each other the life; a public challenge was sent, but not accepted; so that the terror of those great events ended in ridicule, whereby the two chief personages in Christendom greatly demeaned themselves.' Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe*, vol. II, p. 194.

gratifying it, as assured him with irresistible force.³⁸ Now that Francis had been taken prisoner he was no longer in any position to serve as a shield against Charles' ambition, and it appeared for the first time as if nothing remained that could hinder his pursuit of power. The situation appeared so grave, that even the normally terminally capricious Henry VII had finally understood the danger:

He saw all Europe in danger of being over-run by an ambitious Prince, to whose power there now remained no counterpoise; . . . He was sensible that if Charles were permitted to add any considerable part of France to the vast dominions of which he was already master, his neighbourhood would be much more formidable to England than that of the ancient French Kings; while, at the same time, the proper balance on the continent, to which England owed both its safety and importance, would be entirely lost.³⁹

Robertson was describing a moment of epiphany in Henry's mind of epoch-making importance for future English policy. Henry would from this point reorient his policy away from jealous opposition to neighbouring France towards thwarting the ambition of a monarch that now threatened Europe as a whole. If Henry had belatedly come to realise that the maintenance of the balance of power was important to the prestige and security of England, the importance of this maxim had long been understood as key to the very survival of the Italian states in an age of foreign intervention. If Charles' victory over Francis threatened the European balance, it had already shattered that in Italy. From this point onwards the Papacy would rightly understand its interest as fundamentally opposed to Charles' further aggrandisement.⁴⁰

Italy had been right to be concerned; 'intoxicated with prosperity,' Charles had imposed upon Francis the Treaty of Madrid of 1526, where Francis had been forced to

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 230.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 232.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 234.

concede the cities of Naples, Milan, and his own person to Charles as prisoner. Only the overwhelming superiority of Charles' position had allowed for such an agreement, or indeed for any sort of agreement, given the complete breakdown of trust between the two monarchs.⁴¹ The specifics of the treaty had ultimately mattered for little, as Francis had only signed the Treaty as a temporising measure. 'By this disingenuous artifice,' Robertson noted sternly, 'for which even the treatment he received was no apology, Francis endeavoured to satisfy his honour and conscience in signing the treaty, and providing at the same time a pretext on which to break it.'⁴² The statesmen of Europe had held their collective breath in watchful anticipation of the unresolved question: Would Francis abide by the law of nations and honour his treaty commitments, and in so doing, expose Europe to Charles' unchecked ambition?

The decision, as it transpired, had been taken out of his hands, as Leo had summarily absolved Francis of the impolitic oath that would have required his surrendering a clearly unacceptably large amount of territory. Leo's act had been squarely in keeping with the interests of Italian liberty, yet had embodied what Robertson found most pernicious in Popery, the habit of cloaking a ruthless reason of state under the mantle of theology. He added that such contempt for legality was entirely in keeping with the nature of the Papal authority:

This right, how pernicious soever to morals, and destructive of that integrity which is the basis of all transactions among men, was the natural consequence of the Powers which the Popes arrogated as the infallible vice-regents of Christ upon earth; and they having, in virtue of these, often dispensed with obligations which were held sacred, the interest of some men, and the credulity of others, led them to imagine that the decisions of a sovereign pontiff authorised and justified actions which would, otherwise, have been

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 248.

⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 250.

criminal and unbecoming.⁴³

Such artifice Robertson felt had the effect of banishing good faith from diplomacy, a development as dangerous to public order and to public virtue. Yet if the moral failing had belonged to Leo and in a lesser degree, to Francis, the political failing had belonged to Charles alone. Charles, whose deft manipulation of address, dissimulation, and subterfuge had for so long played Francis for the fool, had here become undone through an inability to check his own ambition. He had overplayed his hand through his dishonourable treatment of Francis, needlessly heaping upon himself the jealousy and enmity of the lesser monarchs of Europe. Charles was never to repeat his victory at Pavia.

The contest between Habsburg and Valois had opened a new chapter in the history of European war and diplomacy, a chapter that had terminated with the death of Francis in 1547. Robertson emphasised the novelty of these conflicts both in terms of their unprecedented rancour and unprecedented ability to draw in the better part of Europe as belligerents. This had been due not only to the opposition of their interest, but also to the near perfect balance of their resources: 'The Emperors dominions were of great extent, the French King's lay more compact; Francis governed his kingdom with absolute power; that of Charles was more limited, but he supplied the want of authority by address; the troops of the former were more impetuous and enterprising; the latter better disciplined, and more patient of fatigue.'⁴⁴ The contest between the two monarchs had been predetermined to end in stalemate. A conquest of France never had been a possibility for Charles, yet his constant pursuit of that end had put all Europe on its guard.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 267.

⁴⁴ *Charles*, III, p. 132.

In concluding the first arc of the narrative of Charles V, Robertson had introduced many of the work's principal themes. The rivalry between Charles and Francis lay bare a number of the fault lines of a political society in transition. The two had not only offered a display of contrasting passions at work, but also had revealed two contrasting understandings of the art of politics. The odd moment of weakness aside, the statecraft of Francis had been informed by the Ciceronian virtue of *honestas*; the French king had sought to defend his realm while maintaining an honourable good faith with adversaries. On Robertson's account, Francis had been sincerely astonished and outraged by Charles' repeated violations of the law of nations. Robertson's Charles, in contrast, had fully imbibed the new politics of reason of state; there had been no treaty, no personal understanding, no diplomatic or military convention he had not been prepared to subordinate to his interest. Robertson did not hesitate to censure Charles for his breaches of good faith, but any censoriousness subordinated itself to the need to explicate the fact that Charles' 'address' had proved crucial in creating terms of relative equality between the two men and the two realms. Relying on a series of assumptions concerning the development of civil and military institutions that he was to explore more fully in his long introduction, Robertson could argue that the two had been at that point perfectly matched, the one the beneficiary of progressive institutions, the other actively employing the new arts of politics. Any ruler who would wish to attain a lasting advantage would need to prove progressive and adaptable regarding both, but for the moment Charles and Francis had enjoyed the stage to themselves.

This was not to last. The first great tableau of Robertson's work, the wars between Charles and Francis, described how the 'Italian' art of war and 'Italian' policy

had expanded to include the great northern monarchies. Yet territory and glory, the reasons of state over which these wars had been fought, had been as traditional as their financing and universality of reach had been modern, and as such were for Robertson transitional events in European history. The historian's interpretive point was that Providence had tied Charles' hands through the jealousy of Francis, so as to distract him from the progress of Reformation in Germany. The second great tableau of Robertson's narrative, Charles' operations in the Empire, revealed a dynamic altogether new to European war: religion as a reason of state.

Robertson presented the Reformation as the most important event of European history, the success of which the power politics of the age had ironically made possible. While it could be argued that the experience of the Moderator of the General Assembly was by no means irrelevant to the historian's understanding of the interplay between religion and political interest, Robertson emphasised the transformative role of the Reformation in the history of the human mind. The break with Rome had 'produced a revolution in the sentiments of mankind, the greatest as well as the most beneficial that has happened since the publication of Christianity.' To provide a satisfactory explanation for the rise and progress of the Reformation within the terms of civil history seemed to Robertson an impossible task, and he thus chose to sidestep temporarily the issue by invoking the agency of Providence:

To overturn a system of religious belief founded on ancient and deep rooted prejudices, supported by power, and defended with art and industry, to establish in its room doctrines of the most contrary genius and tendency; and to accomplish all this, not by external violence or the force of arms, are operations which historians the least prone to credulity and superstition, must ascribe to that divine Providence which can, with infinite ease, bring about events that to human sagacity appear impossible. The interposition of Heaven, in favour of the Christian religion at its first publication, was manifested by miracles and prophecies

wrought and uttered in confirmation of it. Though none of the reformers possessed, or pretended to possess, these supernatural gifts, yet that wonderful preparation of circumstances, which disjoined the minds of men for receiving from their doctrines, that singular combination of causes which secured the success, and enabled men destitute of power and of policy to triumph over those who employed both against them, may be considered as no slight proof that the same hand which planted the Christian religion, protected the reformed faith, and reared it, from beginnings extremely feeble, to an amazing degree of strength and maturity.⁴⁵

Robertson's view of the Reformation as the result of the slow and imperceptible workings of Providence led the historian to a discussion of the German constitution; the Empire had both stood in need of a new Revelation and had become prepared to receive it. The Empire had become ripe for revolt. As Germany had been divided into disjointed principalities, no Imperial church had emerged to hold Rome at bay as had the churches Spain and France. Rome had not hesitated to seize the opportunity to strengthen its hold over a divided Germany, and had thus left itself open to wide resentment. The irregularity of the German constitution had further allowed its sovereignty to be constantly and often successfully challenged by ecclesiastical institutions and an over powerful local clergy. This led Robertson to a Humean observation concerning the alienating effects of the steady increase of the priestly prerogative:

As they were consecrated to the priestly office with much outward solemnity; were distinguished from the rest of mankind by a peculiar garb and manner of life; and arrogated to their order many privileges which do not belong to other Christians, they naturally became the objects of excessive veneration. As a superstitious spirit spread, they were regarded as beings of a superior species to the profane laity, whom it would be impious to try by the same laws, or to subject to the same punishments. This exemption from civil jurisdiction, granted at first to ecclesiastics as a mark of respect, they soon claimed as a point of right.⁴⁶

Priestly immunity from prosecution and from taxation had palled with both civil authority and with the people at large. While Robertson presented the German church as a

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 78.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 143.

tottering tyranny ripe for conquest, he nonetheless emphasised the irony of its conquest by a most unlikely general, a bookish and unworldly monk.

As noted in the previous chapter, Robertson was fascinated by historical characters that presided over ruptures in human affairs in apparent ignorance of the laws of history. He emphasised the power of Luther's personality in the distribution of his ideas, presenting him as he had Knox in *The History of Scotland*, as a character perfectly in tune with the rough manners and sensibilities of his audience.⁴⁷ Robertson added that improvement of manners had by the early sixteenth century rendered Luther's audience sufficiently refined to allow them to receive his message. Printing had diffused learning down the social order, and learning itself had made great headway since the days of the schoolmen. 'Mankind seem, at that period, to have recovered the powers of inquiring and thinking,' Robertson remarked, a result of which was a heightened sense of intellectual enterprise.⁴⁸ This was a polite discussion of the origins of Reformation, lacking the acrimonious *ideologiekritik* of earlier partisan accounts such as found in Pufendorf's *Introduction*. Robertson did not enter into either the theology or the institutions of the Roman church, let alone suggest as had Pufendorf that there might have been an unholy alliance between the two. Robertson preferred to condemn the Church as a political institution that stifled liberty; he condemned the pontificates of Alexander VI and Julius II as tyrannical, castigated the venality and the 'gross ignorance and low debauchery' of the clergy generally, and derided those corrupt magistrates who had commodified the forgiveness of sin.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 114.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 116.

⁴⁹ 'In this long enumeration of the circumstances which combined the resistance of his adversaries, I have avoided entering into any discussion of the theological doctrines of popery, and have not in favouring

While banishing theology from civil history certainly had prudential merits for a Presbyterian minister who sought a European audience, Robertson's discussion of the causes of the Reformation was only intended to introduce a new reason of state to European warfare. The second great arc of the narrative shifted the scene to Germany, and Charles and Francis were to have the stage to themselves no longer. The wars of the Emperor against the Smalkaldic league would prove sufficiently indecisive to result in a settlement protecting the Protestant religion, and just as importantly for the future of European statecraft, the wars would further produce statesmen who would assimilate and successfully emulate Charles' dissimulation against him.

As noted in the first chapter, Pufendorf had been baffled as to how Charles could have so misunderstood his true interest as to side with Rome against the princes of his own realm. Robertson preferred to emphasise that the Emperor, whatever way his personal sentiments might have inclined him, had understood his interest to rest upon the authority he garnered as defender of the established religion. In February 1531, a league of Protestant Princes and representatives of cities had formed at Smalkalde to resist the Emperor's insistence on religious conformity, and Charles had thus understood the new heresy primarily as a threat to his authority. In Robertson's portrayal, Charles understood that if he was to maintain his grip on an Empire newly torn by religious strife, he would have to begin to lie like a Pope. He portrayed Charles' first act of dissimulation regarding religion as something of a double deceit. While it was true that Charles had

the progress of Luther's opinions, or in weakening attempted to show how repugnant they are to the spirit of Christianity, and how destitute of any foundation in reason, in the word of God, or in the practice of the primitive church, leaving these topics entirely to the ecclesiastical historians, to whose province they peculiarly belong. . . . it is evident, that their success was the natural effect of many powerful causes prepared by particular providence and happily conspiring to that end'. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 120.

been interested in maintaining the religious unity of the Empire only as a means of maintaining its political unity, acknowledging that religion had any role in his calculation of interest would have been to imprudently provide a rallying cry for the Protestant princes. Ironically then, Charles had needed temporary recourse to honesty in the pursuit of dissimulation, and had thus insisted that he was only engaged in the punishment of disobedient princes.

At this point, a new character, Prince Maurice of Saxony, had appeared upon the stage. The statecraft of Maurice was the fulcrum of Robertson's narrative. Maurice, a statesman with most of Charles' political virtues and few of his political vices, was to prove a far worthier adversary than Francis in the art of dissimulation. As a committed Protestant, Maurice had understood that his interest and that of Charles were diametrically opposed. Yet while he had been shrewd enough not to place any faith in Charles, he was far more importantly prudent enough to know it was not in his interest at this point to act against him.⁵⁰ Maurice's duplicity had exemplified the sort of policy required of a German Protestant prince who could flourish under Charles' rule. A Protestant statesman motivated purely by zeal, unable to separate political interest from religious conviction, such as Maurice's kinsman, the Elector of Saxony, could never have

⁵⁰ 'This young prince, then only in his twentieth year, had, even at that early period, begun to discover the great talents which qualified him for acting such a distinguished part in the affairs of Germany. As soon as he entered upon the administration, he struck out into such a new and singular path, as shewed that he aimed, from the beginning, at something great and uncommon. Though zealously attached to the Protestant opinions both from education and principle, he refused to accede to the league of Smalkalde, being determined, as he said, to maintain the purity of religion, which was the original object of that confederacy, but not to entangle himself in the political interests or combinations to which it had given rise. At the same time, foreseeing a rupture between Charles and the confederates of Smalkalde, and perceiving which of them was most likely to prevail in the combat, instead of that jealousy and distrust which the other Protestants expressed of the Emperors designs, he affected to declare in him an unbounded confidence; and courted his favour with the utmost assiduity. When the other Protestants, in the year 1542, either declined assisting Ferdinand in Hungary, or afforded him reluctant and feeble aid, Maurice rushed thither in person, and rendered himself conspicuous by his zeal and courage. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 20.

acted with sufficient flexibility.⁵¹ Whereas the Elector had foolishly plunged into direct conflict with the Emperor and had been quickly defeated and taken captive, Maurice had decided to play a longer game with Charles, and had instead secured a temporising treaty. Robertson was suitably grave concerning Maurice's duplicity, condemning the treaty as a 'manifest violation of the most powerful principles which ought to influence human actions.' Yet Robertson qualified his judgment, quietly suggesting that Maurice's dissimulation might ultimately have served the Protestant cause. He further remarked that Maurice may well have originally intended to keep his word, but subsequently found this impossible.⁵² Whatever Maurice's actual intentions, if had placed his trust in Charles, that trust had been savagely mocked by the Emperor's subsequent conduct. Charles' subsequent military operations in Germany had been brutal and unrelenting, the grim manifestation of 'the Emperor's exorbitant ambition, restrained neither by the scruples of decency, nor the maxims of justice.' Adopting the 'haughty and imperious tone of a conqueror' Charles had successfully sought the 'unconditional submission' of his subjects.⁵³

The role of conqueror had prepared Charles for the role of tyrant. 'The Emperor,' Robertson related, 'having now humbled, and as he imagined, subdued the independent and stubborn spirit of the Germans by the terror of arms and the rigour of punishment,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 60.

⁵² 'Nor was the Prince who ventured on all this, one of those audacious politicians, who, provided they can accomplish their ends, and secure their interest, disregard avowedly the most sacred obligations, and glory in condemning whatever is honourable or decent. Maurice's conduct, *if the whole must be ascribed to policy*, was more artful and masterly; he executed his plan in all its parts, yet endeavoured to preserve, in every step which he took, the appearance of what was fair, virtuous, and laudable. It is probable, from his subsequent behaviour, that with regard to the Protestant religion at least, his intentions were upright, that he fondly trusted to the Emperor's promises for its security, but that, according to the fate of all who refine too much in policy, and who tread in dark and crooked paths, in attempting to deceive others, he was, in some degree, deceived.' *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 100.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 158.

held a diet at Augsburg, in order to compose finally the controversies with regard to religion, which had so long disturbed the Empire.⁵⁴ Charles had now felt his position strong enough to enforce religious uniformity by the sword. The imperial cities that had provided the most resistance, such as Augsburg, had received the most severe treatment. Robertson felt that at the moment the Emperor had forced each citizen to swear an oath on his provisional religious settlement, his hubris had reached its apogee. The German cities had long cherished their liberty, and had thus submitted in frustrated outrage to an act that had no constitutional validity whatever. It had become clear that Charles had come to recognise no limitation to his authority. The newly elected Paul III, had been quick to see Charles' new ceasaropapist ambitions as a direct threat to his spiritual supremacy. Yet Paul had been as astounded by the imprudence of the Emperor's subjection of Germany as he had been fearful of the assertion of raw power.⁵⁵ Despite the pontiff's urging of caution, Charles had been unwilling to relent in his suppression of the Protestants.⁵⁶ Yet Charles had realised that the seeds of resistance had remained, and in a show of force, had kept the German burghers under the armed guard of Spanish troops.⁵⁷

All might well have been lost for the Protestants had it not been for Maurice's well-plotted manoeuvrings. Robertson was careful to emphasise how his prudent restraint had allowed Maurice, now Elector of Saxony, to slowly augment his standing and capacity for action. The Elector's earlier caution had further allowed him to observe the Emperor at close quarters so as to comprehend his ambition to subordinate Germany as he had Spain, and to forcibly reinstate the Roman rite. Maurice's jealousy had been

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 162.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 192.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol III, p. 193.

peeked at Charles' presumption, and his own vanity had disallowed any possibility of further subservience. He had patiently studied the political landscape, and had realised the hour of necessity had arrived.⁵⁸ Robertson applauded the Elector's decision to formally declare against the Emperor, noting that 'his passions concurred with his interests in confirming this resolution.' Robertson no longer described Maurice's opposition in terms of breach of treaty; one was under no obligation to honour a contract with a tyrant who did not honour his. And so it had proven; Robertson reserved his sharpest criticism for the Emperor's breach of faith in tearing up the treaties made with the German princes:

No pretension to a power so pernicious to society as that of abrogating at pleasure the most sacred laws of honour, and the most formal obligations of public faith, had hitherto been formed by any of the Roman Pontiffs, who, in consequence of their claim of infallibility, arrogate the right of dispensing with precepts and duties of every kind. All Germany was filled with astonishment, when Charles assumed the same prerogative. The state of subjection, to which the Empire was reduced, appeared to be the most rigorous as well as intolerable than that of the most wretched and enslaved nations, if the Emperor by an arbitrary decree might cancel those solemn contracts, which are the foundation of that mutual confidence whereby men are held together in social union⁵⁹

In his perfidy Charles had become indistinguishable from a Pope. This last tyrannical act served as something of a point of no return in Robertson's estimation. From this point onward, the tragic dimension of Charles' hubristic ambition was impossible to ignore. It had proven that the established pattern of Charles' character was to remain unsatisfied with success, before undoing that success by overreaching himself, and this he had done again. Having won a substantial military victory over the Smalkaldic league, the Emperor had sought to transform the German crown into one of pure despotism.⁶⁰ Here

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 194.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 200.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 204

Robertson's reader would be reminded of the work's dedication, and the parallel between the moments of decision faced by Charles and George III. George, Robertson maintained, had set a prudent limit to his ambition, and had consolidated a great success. Charles could do no other than continue to press on, long after it would have been prudent to cease. He had alienated his brother Ferdinand through an attempt to secure the Imperial title for his son Philip. Ferdinand, who, as King of the Romans and as Archduke of Austria had been fully entitled to expect that the crown would fall to him, was justifiably perturbed, and began to turn a friendly ear to the appeals of Maurice.

The Elector, meanwhile, had been making enormous strides on the battlefield, and had soon proceeded to liberate the cities of northern Germany and to re-establish their Protestant churches.⁶¹ Charles in contrast had again found himself undone by lack of funds, and had been thus unable to reverse the tide against him. Support for Charles had quickly evaporated, as even the Catholic Princes had begun to question whether loyalty to Charles was worth the cost of their liberty and the peace of the Empire. Charles too had grown apprehensive of future conflict, as he had come to realise that the new league under Maurice promised to be far more formidable than had the league of Smalkalde. The 1552 treaty of Passau had thus marked an end to Charles' ceasaropapist ambitions in Germany, and signalled the final consolidation of the triumph of Maurice and of the Protestant religion. The absurdity of the fact that Charles and Maurice had ironically acted in concert as handmaidens to the birth of the first codified protection of the Protestant faith elicited from Robertson a bemused aside:

It is a singular circumstance, that the Reformation should be indebted for its security and full establishment in Germany, to the same hand which had formerly brought it to the brink of destruction, and that both events should be

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 238.

accomplished by the same acts of dissimulation. The ends, however, which Maurice had in view, at these different junctures, seem to have been attended to the means by which he attained them; and he was now as universally extolled for his zeal and public spirit, as he had lately been condemned for his indifference interested policy. It is no less worthy of observation, that the French King, a monarch zealous for the Catholick faith, should, at the very time when he was persecuting his own Protestant subjects with all the fierceness of bigotry, employ his power in order to protect and maintain the Reformation in the Empire; and that the league for this purpose, which proved so fatal to the Roman catholick bigotry. So wonderfully doth the wisdom of God superintend and regulate the caprice of human passions, and render them subservient towards the accomplishment of His own purposes.⁶²

Robertson understood all the base foibles of his protagonists, the over-reaching ambition of Charles, the jealousy of Francis and the calculation of Maurice, as equally unaware instruments of providence. The historian thus effectively cut the Gordian knot of reconciling the dark arts of reason of state with governance for the common good; the issue became redundant when no politician could fall so low as to render himself an unfit vessel for the fulfilment of God's will.

The liberty of conscience granted the Protestant Princes at Passau had been officially confirmed with the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, when the doctrine of *cujus regno, cujus religio* had become the law of the Empire. Robertson was careful to emphasise that legal toleration was in no way the daughter of the Dutch view of philosophical toleration that gained acceptance a century and a half later; the Peace of Augsburg had been a simple triumph of calculated *politique*. It would be expected that a Presbyterian minister might find a treaty that expressly forbade his own faith to fall some way short of the full light of reason.⁶³ The statesman had recommended toleration for reasons of policy, not of theology. Robertson had earlier prepared his readers for this message by defending the right of the Anabaptists to exist in peace, as they had professed nothing 'inconsistent with

⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 260.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 333-7.

the peace and order of human society.⁶⁴ The philosopher understood that tolerance was a reason of state.

Robertson continued his narrative up to the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis of seven years later, but by that point the tragedy of Charles' career as a politician had long since reached its climax. The ambitious tyrant had abdicated due to the ill health brought on by a life in pursuit of conquest; his career as a statesman had ended in stark failure. For Robertson, Charles had been no visionary Lycurgus, laying down the principles on which the new international order would operate. At no point had he registered the slightest understanding that he had established a durable dynamic of relations between states. Yet Robertson held his history to have a contemporary political relevance far transcending the cautionary tale of his protagonist. Had he concluded his text at this point, the reader would be left with the conclusion that the eighteenth-century system rested upon nothing more solid than the folk memory of resistance to a dangerous would-be hegemon.

Charles V would have still laid claim to the status of philosophical history through its psychology of personal emulation and the complexity of its causal analyses, but its claim as a foundational narrative for subsequent politics would have been tenuous. Robertson attempted to address this lacuna in the valedictory passages of Book XII, entitled a 'general review of the period.' The greatest European conqueror since Charlemagne had produced no lasting conquests, a fact which had little to do with Charles and everything to do with the fact that lasting conquest was no longer possible upon the European stage:

Upon reviewing the transactions of any active period, in which the history of civilized nations, the changes which are accomplished appear wonderfully disproportional to the efforts which have been exerted. Conquests are never very extensive or rapid, but among nations, whose progress is improvement is extremely unequal . . . But when nations are in a similar state, and keep pace with each other in their advances towards refinement, they are not exposed to

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 350.

the calamity of sudden conquest. Their acquisitions of knowledge, their progress in the art of war, their political sagacity and address, are nearly equal. The fate of states in this situation, depends not on a single battle. Their internal resources are many and various. Nor are they themselves alone interested in their own safety, or active in their own defence. Other states interpose, and balance any temporary advantage which either party have acquired. After the fiercest and most lengthened contest, all the rival nations are exhausted, none are conquered. At length a peace is concluded, which re-instates each in possession of almost the same power and the same territories.⁶⁵

Europe had attained a state of equilibrium, and the wars of Charles V had set the pattern for the subsequent 'managed conflicts' of the early modern period. In essence, the kingdoms of modern Europe had little to fear from each other, as all were now on a substantially similar footing. The balance of power achieved by the early sixteenth century rested on the fact that the key 'enormous monarchies' were roughly congruent in their military capabilities:

Such was the state of Europe during the reign of Charles V. no Prince was so much superior to the rest in power, as to render his efforts irresistible, and his conquests easy. No nation had made progress in improvement so far beyond its neighbours as to have acquired a very manifest pre-eminence. Each state derived some advantage, or was subject to some inconvenience, from its situation or its climate; each was distinguished by something peculiar in the genius of its people, or the constitution of its government. But the advantages possessed by one, were counterbalanced by circumstances favourable to others; and this prevented any from attaining such superiority as might have been fatal to all. The nations of Europe in that age, as in the present, were like one great family; there were some features common to all, which fixed a resemblance; there were certain peculiarities to each, which marked a distinction. But there was not among them that wide diversity of character of genius which, in almost every period of history, hath exalted the Europeans alone above the inhabitants of the other quarters of the globe, and seems to have destined the one to rule, the other to obey.⁶⁶

Europe enjoyed both cultural and constitutional uniformity, amidst the variety of national difference, and this uniformity prohibited the efficacy of any lasting conflict of the type

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp 430-31.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp 431-32.

Charles was widely feared to have pursued. Conquest presupposed instead that fundamental inequality in national force that distinguished European from non-European peoples. The passage can be read as a partial celebration of national difference, but it was far more a celebration of European cultural unity. If empire over the other peoples of the earth fulfilled a providential purpose, that providence did not make neat distinctions on the basis of nationality; no special claim was advanced or implied for the superior virtues of one European empire over another.

Thus far Robertson has contended that by the early sixteenth century, universal monarchy was not possible due to cultural and developmental congruence between national competitors. To say so might explain why Charles, or any future monarch similarly ambitious, might never have posed a serious threat to an existing European balance, but still did not explain why Charles' reign itself had brought this about. Robertson was keen to emphasise in this context that Charles' reign had been an active catalyst in the promotion and encouragement of his competitors; this fusion of the structural with the psychological was the conceptual fulcrum of *Charles V*:

It was during his reign, and in consequence of the perpetual efforts to which his enterprising ambition roused them, that the different kingdoms of Europe acquired internal vigour, that they discovered the resources of which they were possessed, that they came to feel their own strength, and to know how to render it formidable to others. It was during his reign, too, that the different kingdoms of Europe, formerly single and disjointed, became so thoroughly acquainted, and so intimately connected with each other, as to form one great political system, in which each took a station, wherein it has remained since that time with less variation than could have been expected after the events of two active centuries.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 432.

The passage was an obvious nod to Voltaire, but Robertson was advancing a more sophisticated argument than that of his predecessor. In a world of newly sociable enormous monarchies, the psychological desire for personal emulation led in turn to a sort of national emulation. Robertson was not merely arguing that the states of Europe achieved regularity and vigour of action *during* Charles' reign, he was advancing the far more ambitious claim that the improvement of the states of Europe had transpired *because* of his reign. European princes, such as Maurice, had jealously studied the means by which Charles' had achieved his ends and the means by which Francis had been able to thwart them, and had emulated those policies that had proven successful. This national emulation played out as a sort of new international sociability; a complex web of war and diplomacy newly possible as princes rendered their states more regular, their acquisition of revenue more efficient and their foreign policies more vigorous. It was thus war, not commerce, which had served as the original focus of international competition and source of improvement. Robertson's analysis might seem to take the great man theory of history to absurd lengths within the context of a philosophical history, and in partial realisation of the insufficiency of his narrative thus far to explain how this emulation had proven possible led him to follow up that narrative with a lengthy discussion of how the uniform progress of society in Europe had resulted in an approximate balance of military capacities.

All that remained for Robertson in concluding the narrative portion of his history was to drive home some of the more obvious political lessons to be drawn from the impossibility of universal monarchy in a Europe that had attained equilibrium. The irony was that however formative Charles' reign may have been in the creation of the state

system; the long shadow of his reign in the memory of subsequent European statesmen had become responsible for a fundamental misreading of the European scene:

A family so great and so aspiring became the general object of jealousy and terror. All the power as well as policy of Europe were exerted during a century, in order to check and humble it. Nothing can give a more striking idea of the ascendant which it had acquired, and of the terror which it had inspired, than that after its vigour was spent with extraordinary exertions of its strength, after Spain was become only the shadow of a great name, its monarchs sunk into docility and dotage, the house of Austria still continued to be formidable. The nations of Europe had so often felt its superior power, and had been so constantly employed in guarding against it, that the dread of it became *a kind of political habit*, the influence of which remained, when the causes, which had formed it, ceased to exist.⁶⁸ (italics mine)

Fear of a Habsburg bid for universal monarchy had become more Pavlovian than perceptive. It would have been an unnecessary provocation to Robertson's Pittite opponents to point out that the rise of Frederick's Prussia had recently rendered the House of Austria less formidable still. But if the clichéd trope of the decline of Spain suited Robertson's purposes nicely, its corollary, the ascendancy of France surely did not. Recent conflict over colonial possessions in the Americas was clearly based on something rather more pertinent to the national interest than 'a kind of political habit', the Bourbon menace required a more subtle dismissal.

Robertson's problem here was particularly acute, for the period immediately following Cateau-Cambresis had been something of a high point for France. She had recently recovered Calais and Metz, and had emerged better fortified against invasion than at any previous point in her history. Robertson conceded as much, and even insisted that this moment had represented the peak of her potential threat to 'European liberty.'

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 436-7.

But ultimately, Robertson insisted, it had come to nothing, for France's political fortunes were soon to decline sharply as she slid into civil war.⁶⁹ France was of course to recover her position in the next century under the guiding influence of Cardinal Richelieu and Colbert, but by then, Robertson argued, the moment was past, and the opportunity for conquest slipped away. He insisted that French recovery was no threat; it was rather to be celebrated as well deserved and no less than 'the extent of the kingdom, the nature of her government, and the character of her people, entitle her to maintain.'⁷⁰ This was an extraordinary claim for Robertson to have advanced, quietly making the point that the century old Whig spectre of a Bourbon universal monarchy had been so much froth, and that the European equilibrium had been sufficiently stable to absorb any shocks created by the economic reforms of Colbert or the personal ambition of Louis XIV.

Yet even if Robertson's Whig readers were able to countenance such a 'Tory' argument, such arguments did little to counter those in specific terror of French *Popery* as a threat to the *religious* liberties of Europe. It was of crucial tactical importance for Robertson to insist that the late sixteenth-century French Wars of Religion and all the images of blood soaked butchery they invoked were the consequence of ambition, and not of Counter-Reforming enthusiasm.⁷¹ They were conflicts different in degree, but not in kind, from those fought between Charles and the Protestant League earlier in the century. Of even greater importance was to diffuse the idea that any of the modern

⁶⁹ Robertson was equally firm that these civil wars had been *politique* affairs, and not inspired by enthusiasm. 'But how formidable soever or fatal to the other nations of Europe the power of such a monarchy might have been, the civil wars which broke out in France saved them at that juncture from feeling its effects. These wars, *of which religion was the pretext and ambition the cause*; wherein great abilities were displayed by the leaders of the different factions, and little conduct of firmness were manifested by the crown under a succession of weak Princes, kept France embroiled for half a century'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 440.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ see note 327 above.

Catholic monarchies could anymore be Popish satellites of Rome. Robertson insisted that, no 'secondary power' in Europe had undergone a greater revolution during the course of the sixteenth century than the Papacy itself, and he underscored the importance of this to his argument by according equal space to the Papacy as to all the rest of Europe combined. The Reformation had dealt a blow to the papacy both spiritual and temporal; doctrines of Papal infallibility had fallen into disrepute, and Rome had suffered devastating material losses undermining her power of patronage. Accordingly, all subsequent Popes were to find their potential spheres of influence sharply truncated, and were obliged to limit their ambition accordingly.

It was never, however, the minister's attempt to dismiss entirely the real threat Popery had caused in the past; he remained too much of a Presbyterian and too much of a revolution Whig for that. A tension thus crept in to Robertson's discussion of the state of the Low-Countries and Sweden in regard to their celebrated reputations as resisters of Popish tyranny. He seemed to seek simultaneously to celebrate past resistance, while softly suggesting that not only had these conflicts been fought over secular concerns but also that they had constituted a chapter of history no longer relevant to the policy of Europe. It may seem at first glance that Robertson was pursuing two contradictory lines of interpretation, first that the threats of lasting conquest of first the house of Austria and then the house of Bourbon were simply illusory, and second to celebrate the history of the first half of the seventeenth century as a series of successful revolts against militant political Catholicism. This was not, however, a necessarily confused strategy. It was not essential to Robertson's argument that either Phillip II or the emperor Mathias correctly understood the limits of the hand they had been dealt in terms of material resources; it

was the logic of Robertson's thesis that this had been unlikely. Nor had the alleged personal bigotry of Phillip or Mathias fundamentally altered the fact that ambition was the cause, and religion the pretext of these conflicts. As Robertson had emphasised in his discussion of the imperial policy of Charles V, maintaining confessional uniformity had been a reason of state in its own right and, even more significantly, Rome had been in no position to coordinate such efforts. Perhaps most fundamentally, it was no part of Robertson's thesis that the stability of Europe was predicated upon the cessation of such defensive wars against ill-founded ambition. Whatever else Charles may have inaugurated, it had not been an age of peace. Robertson's text introduced an age not of the diminution of ambition, but of its limitation.

Robertson could be thought of as applying a Fergusonian, as opposed to a Humean, notion of conflict from the sphere of domestic constitutional thought to that of the international stage. For Ferguson, whose *Essay on the History of Civil Society* Robertson had read and admired in manuscript well before its 1767 publication, had advanced a Machiavellian understanding of how civil conflict and faction was essentially creative and conducive to liberty. In the section of his work entitled 'The History of Subordination,' Ferguson discussed how the common good is the result of contested interests vigorously pursued.

To bestow on communities some degree of political freedom, it is perhaps sufficient, that their members, either singly, or as they are involved with their several orders, should insist on their rights; ...the citizen should either maintain his own equality with firmness, or restrain the ambition of his fellow-citizens within moderate bounds... The public interest is often secure, not because individuals are disposed to regard it as the end of their conduct, but because each, in his place, is determined to preserve their own. Liberty is maintained by the continued difference and oppositions of its members, not by their concurring zeal in behalf of equitable government. In free states, therefore, the wisest laws are never, perhaps, dictated by the interest and spirit of any order of men: they are moved, they are opposed, or amended, by different hands;

and come at last to express that medium and composition which contending parties have forced one another to adopt.⁷²

This insight had potentially troubling implications for any peaceful equilibrium between states. Extrapolating from Fergusson's reading, even if one granted that lasting conquest was no longer possible, conflict between states was not merely unavoidable but a pre-requisite to the exercise of liberty. If Robertson recognised the force of this insight, he was careful to moderate its prescriptive implications; it remained the core of Robertson's thesis that British fears of French conquest and Popish universal monarchy were chimerical. Yet as much as the historian may have wished to guide the behaviour of statesmen towards a disinterested pursuit of the general good, he did not maintain that the balance of power required a Europe of stoical actors. *Charles V* was a text intended to moderate and place limits upon conflict; it was not a manifesto for perpetual peace.

As mentioned above, if one reads *Charles V* in the order of its composition, the preceding passages do not support the explanatory weight Robertson sought to give them. The conventions of neo-classical narrative were ill suited to the type of structural explanation Robertson required. To flesh out the history of European equilibrium, and hence of European liberty, required a history of laws, not simply of men. After completing the narrative portions of the text, Robertson proceeded to provide an introductory survey of the laws and manners of a newly carved out *longue durée* that Pocock has termed 'the Christian millennium', the period from the fall of the Roman Empire to the time of Charles V.⁷³ Robertson's purpose in so doing was to explain how prudent statesmen had found it in their capacity to emulate successful competitors. In so

⁷² Adam Fergusson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, edited by Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 128.

⁷³ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 278.

doing, he brought the resources of Scottish natural jurisprudence for the first time to bear on the history of the balance of power and of European equilibrium.

Part III: The Progress of Society as the development of equilibrium

As remarked above, Robertson's *Charles V* is noteworthy for its 'broken back'. That the work's two component parts belong to such demonstrably distinct genres led many contemporary and most modern readers to consider the introductory 'A View of the Progress of Society in Europe' independently from its companion volumes as a free-standing exemplary model of the new histories of civil society' written by Ferguson or Millar.⁷⁴ However, that the composition of the View followed that of the narrative portion of the history suggests that Robertson was able to provide his narrative with precisely the focused thematic introduction it required. That theme was the development of the constitutional pre-conditions for modern warfare.

Adam Smith's denunciation of the *View* as a plagiarism of his own lectures on jurisprudence often overshadows its modern reputation as a work of original erudition. Smith's charges, while of course interesting and highly revealing in their own right, need not detain us overlong. Smith was jealous of his unpublished intellectual property to the point of pathology. He angrily and often denounced those 'scribblers' who sought to record his lectures for their own study purposes. Even if largely accurate, however, the charge is at present impossible to verify. The relevant section of the lectures, on arms and warfare, is entirely missing from the 1762 lectures that form the basis of our understanding of Smithian historiography.

⁷⁴ Although one should add that Millar's *Observations concerning the Distinction of Rank in Society* does not squarely belong to that genre either, intending at least to be a much more focused study of the history of women.

We do know that Robertson attended Smith's early Edinburgh series of lectures in the 1750s, but we do not have a detailed account of their content.⁷⁵ On the evidence of the student notes taken in Glasgow, by 1762 the European balance was not a major intellectual preoccupation for Smith; his only mention of it in his lectures was rather dismissive. Nor is there much to support the fact that he would have viewed the reign of Charles V as particularly important in shaping that balance. Where Smith did explicitly mention Charles in his lectures, it was as Puffendorf had done, emphasising his contribution to the arrested development of a centralised Imperial government. The failure of Germany to develop a regular constitution was, from Smith's perspective, a rupture with the European norm as fundamental as any English exceptionalism.⁷⁶ While this was an important corrective point to make, it did not accord Charles a uniquely pivotal role in European history. Furthermore, there is little to suggest that Smith viewed the balance of military capacities between states as the crucial outcome of the progress of civilisation in Europe. Far from seeing the balance of power as the principal on which both the history and historiography of Europe hinged, Smith made mention of the concept only to explain the rise of the resident ambassador.

Though one country might attain some kind of pre-eminence by the influence and assiduity of its ambassador, no attention was for a long time given to it, and that balance of power which has of late been so much talked of was never then heard of. Every sovereign had enough to do within his own dominions and could bestow little attention on foreign powers. Before the institution of residents they could have little intelligence. But ever since the beginning of the 16th century the nations of Europe were divided into two great alliances. On the one hand were England, Holland, Hungary, Muscovy, etca. On the other France, Spain, Prussia, Denmark, Sweden, etca. In this manner a kind

⁷⁵ John Callander of Craigforth had remarked that 'Dr. Robertson had borrowed the first volume of his history of Charles V from them as every student could testify', and quoted Smith as having remarked that the historian 'was able to form a good outline but he wanted industry to fill up the plan.' quoted in W. R. Scott, *Adam Smith as Student and Professor* (Glasgow, 1937), pp. 55-56.

⁷⁶ A. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Indianapolis, 1982), pp. 264-265. The other mention of Charles in the lectures is a mistake, the transcriber (revealingly) having confused 'Charles the 5th' with 'Charles the Great, or Charlemagne'. cf p. 288.

of alliance was kept up, sometimes one leaving the one side and another joining it, as at present Prussia is with England and Hungary on the other side. A system of this kind was established in Italy about the 15th century among the great families there. The resident ambassadors of these nations hinder any one country from dominating another either by sea or land, are formed into a kind of council not unlike that of the Amphictyons in ancient Greece.⁷⁷

Smith, then, like Robertson, saw the early sixteenth century as the moment when the balance of power emerged as the goal of statesmen. But the great alliances Smith referred to were those of the late seventeenth century, not those of the early sixteenth, when the European system, such as it was, was characterised by the rivalry between the houses of Habsburg and Valois.⁷⁸ In any case, the two texts did not belong to the same genre. Smith fleshed out a system of jurisprudence with examples from European history. Robertson employed the conceptual framework of Scottish jurisprudence to tell the history of Europe.

A View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire, to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century was itself divided into three sections, moving from a discussion of 'interior Government, Laws, and Manners,' to 'the command of the national force required for foreign operations,' and ending with an analysis of 'the political Constitution of the principal States in Europe, at the Commencement of the sixteenth Century.' The first section famously narrated the rise of 'regular government' throughout Europe as a consequence of the transition from feudal to commercial society, the second revealed the new capacities available to the emerging independent states. The third section discussed the relative regularity of governments, with a view to demonstrate how their recent constitutional history set the parameters of their effective action. While the *View* remained a work of history rather than of

⁷⁷ A. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, pp. 552-553.

⁷⁸ France and Spain, for example, remained on opposite sides until the reign of Louis XIV.

jurisprudence in that it remained at all times tied to specific historical *transactions*, it was nonetheless a mode of historical narrative at the farthest possible remove from the chronicle. Indeed, to turn from the tight, intricate narrative proper to its introductory essay is to sense a general opening up, as the philosophers gaze casts more widely and the tone, if possible, becomes even more solemn and portentous. The heightened tone served to illustrate the broader scope and greater philosophical ambition of a macronarrative of the operation of general causes over space and time. Robertson's discussion of the relative lack of importance of precise chronology echoed that of the *Universal History* of Voltaire, and more distantly, that of Bossuet. 'In pointing our and explaining these causes and events it is not necessary to obscure the order of time with a chronological accuracy', Robertson remarked, 'it is of more importance to keep in view their mutual connection and dependence, and to show how the operation of one event, or of one cause, prepared the way for another, and augmented its influence'.⁷⁹ There was some irony in the fact that Robertson expressed the philosopher's contempt for mere factual exactitude within the section of his work that owed as much to the antiquarian as to the narrative historian.

Robertson opened with a sweeping historical generalisation that would assume greater significance in his subsequent *The History of America*: 'Two great revolutions have happened in the political state, and in the manners of the European nations. The first was occasioned by the progress of the Roman power; the second by the subversion of it.'⁸⁰ He opened with an ambivalent portrait of history's most lasting conquest, the universal monarchy of Rome, in order to contrast it with the barbarian conquest that

⁷⁹ *Charles V*, vol I, p. 22.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 1.

followed. Robertson provided a civil, as opposed to a civic, interpretation of Roman expansion, conquest and consolidation; progress had been the precondition of empire. Roman military expansion had resulted from the relative progress of her civilisation, not primarily from any martial enthusiasm. Robertson was disinclined to connect the liberty under the law enjoyed by a Roman citizen and that anarchy in which wild Germans in their forests indulged. Neither was there space for parallels between their contrasting modes of conquest. 'When nations subject to despotic governments make conquests, these serve only to extend the dominion and the power of their master. But armies composed of freemen conquer for themselves, not for their leaders'. While her republican institutions endured, Roman conquest of the latter variety, and had thus proved relatively benign. 'The Roman Commonwealth', he wrote, 'had conquered the world by the wisdom of its civil maxims, and the rigour of its military discipline. But under the Emperors, the former were forgotten or despised, and the latter was gradually relaxed'.⁸¹ A corruption of constitutional status had transformed the manners of the Roman conquerors, with lasting repercussions for the nature of that empire itself. The Roman *imperium* had become Janus faced, it tyrannised as it civilised; 'the dominion of the Romans, like that of all great empires, degraded and debased the human species.' Robertson cited the case of the Britons, who had once roundly seen off the invading Romans, but upon succumbing to the Roman jurisdiction had no energy thereafter to resist the encroach of the Saxons.

The real drama, however, in Robertson's thumbnail sketch of Roman history lies in the clash between Roman civilisation and German barbarity. As always for Robertson, cultural comparison served to explain the nature of conflict and imbalance between

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 6.

forces. The Romans, while partly sunk into a decadence of manners, still engaged in battle for eminently 'civilised' concerns of calculated national interest.

Civilised nations which take arms upon cool reflection, from motives of policy or prudence, with a view to guard against some distant danger, or to prevent some remote contingency, carry on their hostilities with so little rancour, or animosity, that war among them is disarmed of half its terrors.⁸²

Barbarian conquest was fundamentally different from that of the Romans – and altogether more horrible. The barbarian hordes, in the sharpest contrast, lived and fought for the moment. 'They rush into war with impetuosity, and persecute it with violence. Their sole object is to make their enemies feel the weight of their vengeance.'⁸³ Robertson famously chose this period, from AD395 to 571, as the lowest ebb of all human history, painting the waves of barbarian invasions as a series of natural disasters. He even gently chided the historian of late antiquity, Procopius, for allowing 'a principle of benevolence' to prevent him portraying what amounted to a near universal genocide. Robertson himself recoiled from disgusting his readers with a 'minute narration' of barbarian atrocities. Attila, 'one of the most enterprising conquerors mentioned in history' perhaps represented the nadir, laying waste to whole cities. Robertson was one son of the manse who emphatically had no time for the Huns, 'It is endless, it is shocking, to follow these destroyers of mankind through so many scenes of horror, and to contemplate the havoc which they made of the human species.'

The urgent moral need to *explain* the radical gulf between civilised and savage modes of conquest pushed Robertson beyond the conceptual world of *Germania* into that of the relationship between constitutions and manners, that of Montesquieu and his

⁸² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

L'esprit des Lois. The consequent exploration – relegated to a footnote – of the jurist's classic parallel between the similarity of manners between the German barbarian and the American savage led Robertson to first state a claim which was to be fleshed out with greater sophistication in future writings, that of the causal relationship between 'national character' and the 'state of society.'

That the characters of nations depends on the state of society in which they lie, and on the political institutions established among them; and that the human mind, whenever it is placed in the same situation, will in ages the most distant, and in countries the most remote, assume the same form, and be distinguished by the same manners.⁸⁴

The study of national character was thus the domain of historical jurisprudence. This was as succinct – and as explicit – a statement of the 'stadialist'⁸⁵ methodology as Robertson was ever to produce, and its relative lack of prominence in the preceding narrative of *Charles V.* is better imputed to lack of relevance than to lack of availability. Robertson had already, in his portrait of the devastation brought by the Huns, pointed his readers' attention to the congruence of certain martial customs with those of the 'savages of North America' such as scalping. Drawing from the sixth book of Caesar's *Commentaries* and Tacitus' *Germania*, Robertson explained this congruence by the fact that like that of the American savages, German society 'was of the rudest and most simple form.' On the whole, the invading barbarians did not practice agriculture. Without landed property to protect, the Germans had little need for civil government. Weak kings lacked the power to compel troops to battle. Of course, they had little need. Each German took to the field to give vent to 'all the rights of private resentment and rage.' The savages of America engage in military enterprises, not from constraint, but choice.'

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p 211

⁸⁵ It is important to note, however, that no variant of this word occurs anywhere in Robertson's writings.

For Robertson, national 'character' was an offshoot of national constitution, the broad set of institutions he collected under the broad-catch all term 'the state of society'. The 'state of society', as discussed by Robertson in the *View*, was intimately related to the type of property held, and it was to the dramatic revolution in property holdings that Robertson next directed his attention. The fact that disparate barbarians were roughly at the same stage of development explained the otherwise astonishing uniformity of the feudal system throughout Europe. The brief discussion of the rise of feudal tenures directed itself squarely to the nature of feudal conflict. At first, of course, the invading barbarians held no property at all, until which point as land recently conquered was given entirely by military leaders in exchange for service in battle. These land grants, *benifices* or *honores*, initially held 'during pleasure', by mutual convenience in time became permanent. The consequence of this was nothing short of a political revolution. The original feudal system was an almost impromptu extension of military to pseudo civilian government, with the subordination required to defend against invasion.

This revolution in property occasioned a change corresponding to it in political government; the great vassals of the crown, as they acquired such extensive jurisdictions usurped a proportional degree of power, depressed the jurisdiction of the crown, and trampled upon the privileges of the people. It is on account of this connection, that the tracing the progress of feudal property becomes an object of attention in history; for upon discovering in what state property was at any particular period, we may determine with precision what was the degree of power possessed by the King or by the nobility at that juncture.⁸⁶

That property was power, and that any analysis of the balance of power quickly transformed into an analysis of the balance of property was the conceptual innovation of the seventeenth-century English republican James Harrington. For Robertson, however,

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 222.

the matchless constitution could not be read back into feudal tenures. The rise of an unfettered military aristocracy was a corruption of the neat subordination of the original feudal contract. The balance of power was doomed to perpetual oscillation and uncertainty, there being no 'many' who could pivot between the 'one' and the 'few.' Robertson's innovation was repeatedly to force the analogy between this transition and the natural juristic narrative of the transition of natural to civil society. Robertson described the feudal decline into a 'state of nature' in language not far removed from Hobbes. 'The feudal state was a state of perpetual war, rapine, and anarchy; during which the weak and unarmed were exposed every moment to insults and injuries.'⁸⁷

The comparison was more than rhetorical flourish, for in perhaps the most important sense, medieval Europe *was* a state of nature. The rule of law, as regarded personal security and security of property, was unknown. A society where private war could break out at any moment would always remain potentially a state of war of all against all. The chaos and instability of private war was the terminus of the feudal system, a state that held little romance for Robertson. 'This rude practice,' sneered Robertson, 'suitable only to the violence of a state of nature, was tolerated longer than one can conceive possible in any society, where laws and order were at all known'.⁸⁸ Private war was beneath the dignity of history, its accomplishments were in equal measure parochial and ephemeral. The crucial index of the depths to which feudal society had succumbed was that its wars were 'trifling, and insignificant,' the narration of which could provide neither amusement nor instruction. When the human mind became shackled by fear and resentment, it closed in upon itself, atrophied, and produced nothing

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 69.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 255.

of value for over four centuries. The Christian religion itself degenerated into witless ceremonial. This Gothic state of nature was a state of utter corruption. It was as if man had fallen a second time.

For the historian, narrative history required a modicum of intercourse between its protagonists. The fallen 'natural' man of the dark ages required the rule of law if his sociability were to be properly cultivated, and his passions properly restrained. The climax toward which Robertson had been driving in this first section was the reestablishment of commerce and sociability in all its varieties. Such a development had been impossible in the anxious climate of feudal Europe. In the first stages of society, needs had been simple and locally attainable; such societies felt no need to look outwards. As such when barbarians invaded and conquered Europe, they destroyed the unity of Roman civilisation, rendering Europe disjointed and fragmentary. For five centuries European sociability lay moribund. 'Society and manners must be considerably improved, and many provisions must be made for public order and personal security', Robertson explained, 'before a liberal intercourse can take place between nations.'⁸⁹ Another proof of the insularity of Europe during this period was the fact that positive law rigidly enforced hospitality. Above all, the nature of feudal ties greatly militated against travel or relocation. The weak state of justice rendered any travel highly dangerous.

Several events combined to wake the states of Europe from their solipsistic slumber, the crusades, the development of cities, and the revival of Roman Civil Law.

⁸⁹ Robertson was here aware he was compressing an important theme. In an endnote, one of the first volume's 'Proofs and Illustrations', Robertson invoked Montesquieu's similar sentiment upon commencing his own history of commerce. 'The subject which follows would require to be discussed more at large; but the nature of this work does not permit it. I wish to glide on a tranquil stream; but I am hurried along by a torrent.' In this proof, Robertson trawled volumes of German jurisprudence for instances of lack of geographical knowledge. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp.76-7.

Somewhat surprisingly, Robertson accorded the crusades most extensive coverage. Yet, given the ironic position these adventures held *vis à vis* Robertson's general theme of international relations, perhaps their prominence in the narrative was irresistible. 'The only common enterprise in which the European nations ever engaged, and which all undertook with equal ardour, remains a singular monument to human folly.'⁹⁰ That the crusades were not only ludicrous but absolutely pivotal for European progress further made a philosophical point concerning the relationship between individual intentions and universal consequences. The unintended consequence of these adventures was of course, the stimulation of the European taste for eastern luxury, a key moment in the stage of western commerce. More fundamentally, the natural desire to emulate the prosperity of the east provided the psychological impetus to western improvement.

The Crusades reopened communication between East and West, and occurred in tandem – Robertson implied but did not belabour any causal link – with the revival of independent cities and the formation of merchant communities. The second great catalyst of progress was the growth of urban centres. These centres did not come to truly make their mark, however, until they had acquired a political voice in the parliaments of Europe.

The acquisition of liberty made such a happy change in the condition of all the members of communities, as roused them from that stupidity and inaction into which they had been sunk by the wretchedness of their former state. The spirit of industry revived. Commerce became an object of attention, and began to flourish. Population increased. Wealth was attended by its usual attendants, ostentation and luxury; and though the former was inelegant and cumbersome, and the later indelicate, they led gradually to greater refinement in manners, and in the habits of life. Together with this improvement in manners, a more regular species of government and police was introduced. As cities grew to be more populous, and the occasions of intercourse among men increased, statutes and regulations multiplied of course, and all became sensible that their common safety depended on

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 25.

observing them with exactness, and on pursuing such as violated them, with promptitude and rigour. Laws and subordination, as well as polished manners, took their rise in cities, and diffused themselves insensibly through the rest of society.⁹¹

Once unleashed, the forces of progress begat further improvements. Most important, perhaps, was the monopolisation of violence by the state, what Robertson referred to as the 'regularisation of justice'.

The first considerable step towards establishing an equal administration of justice, was the abolishment of the right which individuals claimed of waging war with each other, in their own name, and by their own authority. To repel injuries, and to revenge wrongs, is no less natural to man than to cultivate friendships; and while society remains in its most simple state, the former is considered as a personal right no less unalienable than the latter.⁹²

The growth of urban centres and the subordination they engender began as a primarily Italian affair, but quickly diffused throughout Europe through the agency of colonising Lombard merchants. 'They became the carriers, the manufacturers, and the bankers of all Europe.'⁹³ Subsequent cooperation between the northern Hanseatic League and the Lombards increased the importance of the city of Bruges and consolidated the link between north and south. The English monarch Edward III admired Flemish commerce and sought to import it by way of Flemish artisans; in so doing he established England as an important producer of woollen manufactures.

Commerce was never for Robertson, however, an end in itself. This new 'liberal intercourse' was a transaction worthy of 'the dignity of history' to the extent that it helped set the scene for a new type of war and diplomacy.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 35.

⁹² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 43.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 95.

Commerce tends to wear off those prejudices which maintain distinction and animosity between nations. It softens and polishes the manners of men. It unites them, by one of the strongest of all ties, the desire of supplying mutual wants. It disposes them to peace, by establishing in every state an order of citizens bound by their interest to be the guardians of public tranquillity. as soon as the commercial spirit begins to acquire vigour, and to gain an ascendant in any society, we discover a new genius in its policy, its wars, and its negotiations.⁹⁴

Commerce was a development of great import, in that it dramatically altered both the extent and the nature of intra-state communication. Commerce united the interests of an international merchant class towards pacific reciprocity. That commerce itself could become a reason of state, a source of distinction and animosity between nations, was a possibility Robertson chose not to entertain. In a sense he did not need to. Robertson was introducing an already written account of the war and diplomacy of the mid sixteenth- century, in which religion, not commerce, had recently become the primary reason of state. To insist on the pacific tendency of commercial interests within a state would of course have been untenable had he chosen to continue his narrative down to the late seventeenth century. By keeping within the historiography of the sixteenth century, however, Robertson neatly sidestepped any need to address jealousy of trade. Indeed, dating the European balance in the mid-sixteenth century effected a sharp separation between balance of power and balance of trade. Commerce could remain an unproblematic blessing. It was the ultimate index of the progress of interior government toward regularity that drew the nations of Europe out of their respective shells, to seek out new modes of interaction.

These new modes of interaction were hardly pacific. The *View*'s second section, concerning 'national force requisite in foreign operations'; demonstrated the relevance of

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p 97.

the story told in the first section for a history of transactions. Primitive peoples easily harnessed the material and emotive energies, extended states could only do so under despotic rule or under the influence of 'regular policy', such as the old Roman Republic or eighteenth-century governments. Regular government allowed, for the first time, the effective collection of revenues, and hence, for war on an altogether grander scale. 'The Prince, by the less violent, but no less effectual operations of laws and a well regulated government, is enabled to avail himself of the whole force of his state, and to employ it in enterprises, which require strenuous and preserving efforts'.⁹⁵

This process was only beginning to unfold. At the commencement of the fifteenth century, the state of the European constitution did not allow for concerted policy. The jealousy of the nobility thwarted the possibility of any concerted national – that is to say, royal, endeavour. Crucially, sovereigns lacked the financial resources to properly maintain armies. The other monarchs of Europe did not take, for example, any great notice of the One Hundred Years War or the unfolding Spanish *reconquista*. 'This amazing inactivity', Robertson was keen to impress, was due to the structural limitations of the feudal constitution, emphatically not due to any personal limitations. 'The power of judging with sagacity, and of acting with vigour, is the portion of men in every age.' The fact that European monarchs did not adopt balance of power considerations into their long-term strategic thinking had nothing whatsoever to do with any scarcity of statesmen as watchful, clever, and adaptive as Maurice of Saxony.

This situation only began to alter with the consolidation of the French state. The English loss of the One Hundred Years War was fundamental to the establishment of a general European liberty. Throughout sections two and three of the View, Robertson

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 81.

went further than his Whig readers might have wished in insinuating that progress was a narrative written in French concerning the rise of French national strength. For France developed the first standing army in Europe. The great revolution in warfare of this period was the shift from use of cavalry to use of infantry, a development that predicated the rise of standing armies. 'The strength of an army formed either for conquest or defence,' Robertson noted with the approval of an orthodox humanist,

lies in infantry. To the stability and discipline of their legions, consisting chiefly in Infantry, the Romans during the times of the republic were indebted for all their victories; and when their descendants, forgetting the institutions which led them to *universal dominion*, so far altered their military system as to place their principal confidence in a numerous cavalry, the undisciplined impetuosity of the barbarous nations who fought mostly on foot, was sufficient, as I have already observed, to overcome them.

Cavalry was the form of military organisation of Rome under the emperors. In feudal Europe, cavalry was an extravagance of the silly pride of chivalric nobility. For a monarch to achieve great ends, Robertson continued in distinctly unorthodox humanist fashion, he needed a standing army, the first of which had appeared in France under the rule of Charles VII, through his personal imposition of an 'extraordinary subsidy on his people'. The introduction of the standing army tolled the death knell for the feudal constitution. 'By taking from the nobles the sole direction of national military force, which had raised them to such a high authority and importance', Robertson argued, 'a deep wound was given to the feudal aristocracy, in that part where its power seemed most complete.'⁹⁶ The other monarchs of Europe, motivated from self-defence, had little choice but to attempt the emulation of French practice. Robertson, by firmly associating this revolution in French government with Charles, rather than – as was more common –

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 113.

with his far more controversial son Louis, bestowed upon the standing army a more immaculate conception than was common. For Louis had been a model tyrant:

Adorned with schemes to oppress his people, and to render his own power absolute. Sagacious, at the same time, to discern his true interest, and influenced by that alone, he was capable of pursuing it with a persevering industry, and of adhering to it with a systematic spirit from which no object could divert and no danger could direct him.⁹⁷

Louis had taken six thousand Swiss infantry, and made them into the scourge of Europe.

‘From the jealousy natural to tyrants, he confided in these foreign mercenaries, as the most devoted instruments of oppression, and the most faithful guardians of the power which he had acquired.’⁹⁸ An army of citizens, needless to say, would have had an interest in preventing such an extension of the royal prerogative.

The rulers of Europe were in no better a position to put up resistance to Louis’ encroachments than his own subjects had been.⁹⁹

Louis negotiated in all the courts of Europe; he observed the motions of all his neighbours; he engaged either as principal, or as an auxiliary, in every great transaction; his resolutions were prompt; his operations vigorous; and upon every emergence he could call forth into the action the whole force of his kingdom. From the aera of his reign, instead of the feeble efforts of monarchs fettered and circumscribed by a jealous nobility, the Kings of France, more masters at home, have exerted themselves more abroad, have formed more extensive and foreign conquests, and have carried on war with a spirit and vigour long unknown in Europe.¹⁰⁰

Robertson was keen to emphasise, however, that it was not so much lack of understanding as lack of opportunity, which had rendered European rulers inactive. ‘It

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 99.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 90.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 101.

was owing entirely to the imperfections, and disorders in the civil government of each country, which made it impossible for sovereigns to act suitably to those ideas which the posture of affairs, and their own observation, must have suggested.'

The political career of Louis revealed the darker potential of progress – that regular government made possible a new and more absolute mode of tyranny. For the modern tyrant, with his ability to tax and raise armies, was no longer a threat to the liberties of his own subjects alone, but to those of all of Europe. Providentially, his own 'tragic' flaw, intoxication with his own art of dissimulation, undid Louis. He 'had been accustomed so long to the intricacies of a crooked and insidious policy, that he could not be satisfied with what was obvious and simple; and was so fond of artifice and refinement, that he came to consider these as his ultimate object, not as the means of conducting affairs.'¹⁰¹ The pursuance of an overly refined reason of state, such as Robertson identified with Rome, was not always in a monarch's interest. The ironic effect of Louis' ambition was that it set in place the marriage of Maximilian with the heiress of Burgundy. With Louis, Robertson had set the stage in more than one sense for Charles.

Yet probably the most momentous transaction of the period immediately preceding that of Charles' reign was the invasion of Italy instigated by Charles III of France in 1494. Here Robertson enters into the sea of events narrated by Guicciardini in his *History of Italy*, which he curiously did not cite. Charles, 'a weak but generous Prince,' had, largely through his laxity, presided over a national revival, and thus was well positioned to succumb to the machinations of Ludovico Sforza and gallantly agreed to invade the peninsula on his behalf. First, the Italian campaigns gave birth to a new

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 105.

type of warfare, increasingly destructive through its exploitation of new technologies.

‘The train of artillery, however’, Robertson wrote, ‘the ammunition, and warlike stores of every kind provided for its use, were so great as to bear some resemblance to the immediate apparatus of modern war.’¹⁰² The Italian wars had a surprising legacy for European diplomacy. They did not so much embroil Italy in European politics as embroil Europe in Italian politics.

They had now extended to the affairs of Europe, the maxims of that political science which had hitherto been applied only to regulate the operations of the petty states in their own country. They had discovered the method of preventing any monarch from rising to such a degree of power, as was inconsistent with the general liberty; and had manifested the importance of attending to that great secret of modern policy, the preservation of a proper distribution of power among all the members of the system into which the states of Europe are formed.¹⁰³

The French and Imperial monarchs, for all their huffing and puffing daring-do, were never really a match for the wily and dissembling Italians. They were, however, capable of learning, and, indeed, one can read the entirety of Robertson’s narrative as the slow, faltering apprehension of the rulers of northern Europe of the maxims of Italian statecraft. The third section of the *View* moves from universal to particular history, to the variety amidst the uniformity. The first two sections of the *View* could only be told as universal history, as the ‘institutions and occurrences’ that had ‘formed the people of Europe to resemble each other, and conducted them from barbarism to refinement, in the same path, along the same steps.’ The ‘surprising resemblance among the nations of Europe’ indeed resulted from ‘causes and events, whose influence was universal.’¹⁰⁴ Yet the importance

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 109.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 112.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 123.

of the particular to the general could be fully comprehended only if the 'constitution and political state' of each nation was discussed in its own right. To do so, Robertson adopted the plan of that other great work of universal history, Pufendorf's *Einleitung*, briefly discussing the constitution and recent political history of each polity, less with an idea of determining the 'true interest' or *raison d'état* of each, than to pinpoint the precise status of each constitution relative to capacity for action.

Robertson did follow Pufendorf, however, in viewing the Roman pontiffs as the key political players, and accordingly allotted the 'spiritual dominium' of Rome the most extensive coverage. This was only natural, for they had, after all, not only been the only truly universal monarchs of Europe but the first truly modern politicians. Robertson was fascinated by this curious fusion of the cleric and the monarch, 'so blended together, that it was difficult to separate them even in imagination.' In one important sense Robertson's analysis of the papacy conformed to bullish Whiggery. The papal government was a tyranny built upon superstition. The psychological spark of 'adventurous and well-directed ambition' lit the see of Rome from within. Fortunately, the resources at its disposal did not match papal ambition. Ironically, however, the very vigilance of the Roman barons in checking the physical encroachments of the papal prerogative brought into prominence the argument Rome would successfully exploit in the future. Ecclesiastics should not seek property, but should be economically sustained by the population as a whole. Prudent bishops of Rome would learn to make cynical use of the means at their disposal. 'Pontiffs,' Robertson explained, 'accomplished those great things which rendered them so formidable to the Emperors with whom they contended, not by the force of their arms, or by the extent of their power, but by the dread of their

spiritual censures, and by the effect of their intrigues, which excited rivals, and called forth enemies against every Prince, whom they wished to destroy.¹⁰⁵

In address, dissimulation, far-sightedness, and above all keen ambition, the Papacy possessed all the modern political passions and artifices. 'It was in the Papal court,' Robertson maintained, 'that address and subtlety in negotiation first became a science; and during the sixteenth century, Rome was considered the school in which it could be acquired.'¹⁰⁶ This capacity for dissimulation, duplicity, and dishonesty, coupled with 'unrelaxing constancy of pursuit' made possible 'success in the boldest attempts ever made by human ambition.'¹⁰⁷ The efficacy of the papal administration was limited, however, by an endemic short-sightedness. No 'schemes of public utility or improvement' were furthered. The son of the manse most emphatically did not find anything to celebrate in papal encouragement of the arts. This perhaps goes some way towards revealing why a celebratory cultural history of the reign of *Leo X* would never have been a serious temptation for the historian. Of all the principal states of Europe, it was the Papacy that underwent the most thoroughgoing revolution over the course of Robertson's history, and Robertson was keen ultimately to present the papal power in Europe as a past catastrophe.

Venice came second in the ranking of degree of 'connectedness' with the rest of the Italian balance. Robertson's discussion of Venice was noteworthy primarily for its hostility; he cared little for her 'rigid and partial aristocracy, which lodges all power in the hands of a few . . . while it degrades and oppresses the rest.' Robertson understood that Venetian oligarchy was a club that would not have him as a member. The Venetians

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 128.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 130.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 129.

were also to be lamented their inappropriate aborted attempt at empire building. As ever for Robertson, the constitution of the conqueror determined the nature of the conquest. 'When the Venetians' Robertson wrote, 'so far forgot the interior defects in their government, as to aim at extensive conquests, the fatal blow, which they received in the war excited by the league of Cambray, convinced them of their imprudence and danger of making violent efforts, in opposition to the genius and tendency of their constitution.'¹⁰⁸ Robertson's point here was not that Venice was unfit for empire due to any lack of liberty, but rather that its much lauded 'mixed constitution insufficiently harnessed the creative energies of Venetians to allow for such 'extensive operations' as those thwarted by the League of Cambray.

If Venice had served primarily as a cautionary tale, of more direct bearing on Robertson's subsequent narrative was the nature of the Spanish constitution, which had come to assume its present 'regular and uniform appearance' following the *reconquista* and the Union of Crowns of Castile and Aragon. As we have seen, the state of the Spanish constitution *vis à vis* that of the French was of decisive importance to the wars of Charles and Francis, an importance greater than a narrative of events could properly elucidate. In crushing the Junta, Charles had forever wrecked the ancient Spanish constitution. Robertson devoted more space to the erstwhile Spanish constitution than any other section of the *View*, providing what one might have assumed would prove a love letter to a lost system of liberty. He did not. The salient feature of that constitution was the astonishing and debilitating weakness of the crown.

The regal prerogative, extremely limited in every feudal kingdom, was circumscribed in Spain, within such narrow bounds, as reduced the power of the sovereign almost to nothing. The privileges of the

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I,

nobility were vast in proportion, and extended so far, as to boarder on an absolute independence. The immunities of the cities were likewise greater than in other feudal kingdoms, they possessed considerable influence in the Cortes, and they aspired at obtaining more. Such a state of society, in which the political machine was so ill adjusted, and the several members of the legislature so improperly balanced, produced internal disorders in the kingdoms of Spain, which rose beyond the pitch of turbulence and anarchy usual under the feudal government. The whole tenor of Spanish history confirms the truth of this observation; and when the mutinous spirit, to which the genius of their policy gave birth and vigour, was no longer restrained and overawed by the immediate dread of the Moorish arms, it broke out into more frequent insurrections against the government of their princes, as well as more outrageous insults on their dignity, than occur in the annals of any other country.¹⁰⁹

The history of the Spanish constitution was paradoxical. At one level, Robertson was keen to emphasise that Spain had emerged from the feudal system exactly as had the other states of Europe. Yet it was something of a problem for such an ardent constitutionalist that eight hundred years of Moorish rule contributed so little to the present manners and government of the Spanish. While intriguingly adopting the Humean vocabulary to describe the Moors as Islamic ‘enthusiasts’, Robertson did not portray the Moorish invasions as particularly harsh or anything like as devastating to the native population as previous Gothic invasions. Robertson honoured the Moors to mitigate their historical importance. While the invaders brought with them ‘the manners of the east’ and ‘love of elegance and splendour,’ they had not fully consolidated their conquest, partly because they were unwilling to employ the necessary cruelty to do so. ‘The followers of Mahomet,’ Robertson declaimed, ‘are the only enthusiasts who have unified the spirit of toleration with zeal for making proselytes.’¹¹⁰ In keeping Spain independent of the Caliphate, the Moors lost contact with Africa, and began to decline.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 178.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 175.

Robertson ascribed the Moorish decline – rather unconvincingly – as stemming from a deterioration of their martial spirit resultant from excessive luxury.

Yet if Moorish rule had not itself, largely through its own admirable restraint, reformed Spain in its own image, the fact that the development of Spanish institutions coincided with a period of *reconquista* had the most profound effects on the nature of the Spanish constitution. In fact, Aragon had only the façade of monarchical rule; true sovereignty lay almost entirely with the *cortes*. Robertson was particularly fascinated by the role of the *Justiza*, or supreme judge – in many ways a grander figure with greater civil responsibility than the king – as he was with the privilege of Union, a codified ‘dangerous right’ of resistance against the crown. The burgesses had been represented in the *Cortes* probably from their point of origin, and certainly more than a century before they had been in any other European assembly of note, including of course, that of England. ‘the rights of the people, personal as well as political, were, at that period, more extensive, and better, understood, than in any kingdom of Europe.’ Aragon was at that time the only European country, England included, that did not practise torture. Robertson was equally impressed by the fact that the Aragonese had stoutly resisted the establishment of Ferdinand and Isabella’s Inquisition, on the grounds that its proceedings lacked any due process. Robertson seems to have been genuinely and pleasantly surprised by the quality of erudition and degree of integrity of the early Spanish historians ‘extremely accurate in tracing the progress of law and constitution of their country.’

It is vain to consult the later historians of Spain, about any point with respect to which the excellent historians whom I have named are silent. The ancient constitution of their country was overturned, and despotism established on the ruin of its liberties, when the writers of this and the preceding century composed their histories, and on that account they had little curiosity to know the nature of

those institutions to which their ancestors owed the enjoyment of freedom, or they were afraid to describe them with much accuracy.¹¹¹

This relative lack of Spanish progress was to play a crucial limiting role in Charles' ability to wage war.

It was unnecessary for Robertson to dwell at similar length on the French constitution, as much of that material had already been presented. There did remain a point to score: if Robertson had been pleased in his surprise discovery of kindred spirits among the Spanish historians of an earlier age, he was mildly scandalised by the gross anachronisms of Bourbon hired pens.

Nothing is more common among Antiquaries, and there is not a more copious source of error, than to decide concerning the institutions and manners of past ages, by the forms and ideas which prevail in our own times. The French lawyers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, having found their sovereigns in possession of absolute power, seem to think it a duty incumbent on them, to maintain that such unbounded authority belonged to the crown in every period of the monarchy... It is impossible, however, to conceive two states of civil society more unlike to each other, than that of the French nation under Clovis, and that under Louis XV.¹¹²

The fact was that the French crown, during its formative periods, was every bit as subject to the limitations imposed by the corrupted state of the feudal constitution as had been Spain. Almost all power lay in the general assembly, or *champs*. There was a natural corollary in the inability of Merovingian and Carolingian kings to collect revenue. For Robertson, a key index of the level of barbarity was the degree of resistance to paying taxes. 'Among nations whose manners and political institutions are simple, the public, as well as individuals, having few wants, they are little acquainted with taxes, and free

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 410.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 430-431.

uncivilised tribes disdain to submit to any states.'¹¹³ Invoking the authority of the thirteenth book of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* and Mably's *Observations sur l'Histoire de France*, Robertson concluded that no Frankish property was subject to taxation. Furthermore, Charlemagne himself held annual meetings of the general assembly, an example followed by his successors.

'What has been said with respect to the admission of the people or their representatives into the supreme assembly merits attention, not only in tracing the progress of the French government, but on account of the light which it throws upon a similar question agitated in England, concerning the time when the commons became part of the legislative body in that kingdom.'¹¹⁴ It was entirely characteristic of Robertson's mildly subversive brand of Whiggery that the ancient constitution of England could be best defended against Tory revisionism by raising parallels with the ancient constitution of France. At all points in this discussion, Robertson was at pains to show that the French constitution could be explained in terms universal to the crumbling of the feudal constitution. French kings did slowly extend their prerogative over legislation, but it was a far slower, more halting process than either arch royalists in France or old Whigs in England were inclined to acknowledge. Only by the beginning of the fifteenth century had the French crown felt capable of levying taxes with relative impunity. Yet even as the French constitution ascended to a pure monarchy, it was never entirely without external checks. The cultural prestige of the nobility remained, and the jurisdiction of the *parlement* of Paris prevented any decline into eastern style despotism. Crucial to Robertson's *thèse royale* was that the rise of the regal power was an essentially

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 435.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 442.

progressive development, not only in terms of the rights of the individual, but more pertinently here, to the capacity of the state for external action. If the progress of civilisation possessed a national vanguard, that vanguard was the development of the French constitution, as it passed through stages first of democracy, then of aristocracy, then on to pure monarchy.

If the French constitution had an antipode, it was the German Empire.

Robertson's discussion of the German constitution lacked the specificity accorded Spain or France, a fact that he, with some discomfort, defended by insisting that he was not writing a German national history.¹¹⁵ Robertson followed the example first set by Pufendorf in finding the German constitution, 'that inextricable labyrinth' a most 'feeble and irregular' construction, a polity that utterly defied the classical typology. He specifically denied it the status of 'regular confederacy' as there had never been an historical union of independent states. Neither true confederacy nor true empire, 'the Empire felt every calamity which a state must endure when the authority of government is so much relaxed as to have lost all vigour.'¹¹⁶ Thus, a sovereign of the German empire would have no greater ease raising troops than a king of Spain.

Robertson then entered into far more politically and theologically perilous territory with his concluding comments on the Ottoman constitution. The relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Europe was unclear, as a Muslim polity had, strictly

¹¹⁵ 'With respect to the diets or general assemblies of the Empire, it would be necessary, if my object were to write a *particular history of Germany*, to enter into a minute detail, concerning the forms of assembling it, the persons who have a right to be present, their diversion into several colleges or benches, the objects of their deliberation, the mode in which they carry on their delegates or give their suffrages, and the authority of their decrees or recesses. But in a *general history* it is sufficient to observe that, originally, the Diets of the Empire were perfectly the same with the assemblies of March and May, held by the kings of France'. *Ibid.*, I, p. 383. A not negligible factor here was that Robertson, probably the most able linguist of the Scottish literati, read no German

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 179.

speaking, no place in a universal history of Christian Europe. As Voltaire had shown, one need not be orthodox in one's Christianity to view the Turk as a threat to Europe's collective security and shared cultural inheritance. Yet the source of Robertson's Eurocentric hostility, however, – it could of course be called nothing else – was more political than theological. 'It is the distinguishing and odious characteristick of Eastern despotism,' Robertson scowled, 'that it annihilates all other ranks of men, in order to exalt the monarch; that it leaves nothing to the former, while it gives everything to the latter; that it endeavours to fix in the minds of those who are subject to it, the idea of no relation between men, but that of a master and a slave, the former destined to command and punish, the latter formed to tremble and obey'.¹¹⁷ It would have been surprising for such an avowed Montesquieuan to avoid in this context the distant invocation of the *Lettres Persanes*. Yet intriguingly for Robertson, the Ottoman Empire was a polity of astonishing regularity and military effectiveness. In spite of this, Robertson noted, in a Humean vein, that there were practical limits on even the most 'absolute' of despotisms.

When the form of government in any country is represented to be despotick, this does not suppose that the power of the monarch is continually exerted in acts of violence, injustice or cruelty. Under governments of every species, unless when some frantick tyrant happens to hold the sceptre, the ordinary administration must be conformable to the principles of justice, and if not active in promoting the welfare of the people, cannot certainly have their destruction for its object.¹¹⁸

Thus, Robertson allowed explanatory room for the otherwise (for Robertson) astounding military success of Solymann's armies against the house of Austria. Robertson emerges as an historian considerably more tolerant than his French predecessors. The Ottomans

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 188.

¹¹⁸ Robertson was quick, however, to assert that the term despotism very much retained its analytic usefulness: 'A state, in which the sovereign possesses the absolute command of an extensive revenue; in which the people have no privileges, and no part either immediate or remote in Legislation; in which there is no body of hereditary nobility, cannot be distinguished by any name but that of a despotism'. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 377.

may not have been Europeans, but they were certainly key players in the history of the European balance, and hence, the necessity of their inclusion in any history of Europe.

As a whole, Robertson's view thus had the effect of supplying the key defect of the narrative sections of *Charles V*, that it was too concerned with individuals to provide the explanatory framework for the relationship between the personalities of monarchs and the context in which they found themselves. Robertson was himself quite explicit that a central function of his introductory essay was to prioritise the structural over the personal.

Those active scenes which the following history will exhibit, as well as the variety and importance of those transactions which distinguish the period to which it extends, are not to be ascribed solely to the ambition or the abilities, or to the rivalry of Charles V and of Francis I. The kingdoms of Europe had arrived at such a degree of improvement in the internal administration of government, and princes had acquired such command of national force which was to be exerted in foreign wars, that they were in a condition to enlarge the sphere of their operations, to multiply their claims and pretensions, and to increase the vigour of their efforts. Accordingly the sixteenth century opened with the certain prospect of its abounding in great and interesting events.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 144-5.

Coda: Charles V, the Jesuits and the wider world

It has been argued that the British experience of the Seven Years War was decisive in framing the set of political questions with which the text of Charles V engaged. Yet it should be remembered that hostilities between Britain and France took place in the New World, and the subsequent war was fought as much in the name of commerce, colonies, and religion as it was to protect the liberties of Europe. The fact that Robertson originally intended to include the conquest and settlement of the Americas within the text of *Charles V* achieves a new significance when seen in this light. For in much the same way that Italy had absorbed all Europe into her system of balance at the dawn of the sixteenth century, so by the mid-eighteenth had Europe drawn much of the world into the European balance. It was the task of the chronicler of the hand of providence in guiding the emulation of nations to explain how this had come to pass. While the text of *Charles V* did not address the voyages of discovery or the conquest of the New World, it did narrate Charles' own crusades against the infidel in defence of Christendom, and the impact of the Society of Jesus in the New World.

Robertson, ever a polite historian, normally felt the need to explain to his public the grounds for any extended break in the political narrative, typically on grounds of the availability of new information, the need to weigh impartially the evidence behind a particularly contested point of interpretation, or even of the intrinsic interest of the subject. The case of the Jesuits richly satisfied all three requirements. Robertson professed himself keen to exploit the circumstance that many of the important documents previously so jealously guarded by the highly secretive order had been recently published. Perhaps more importantly, though a point the historian had little need to

underscore, the subject of the Jesuits remained a minefield of controversy throughout the European republic of letters a generation after the order had been expelled. Long denounced in Protestant, and later in anti-clerical polemic, as the Pharisees of Inquisitorial Popery, for the philosophical historian they were a fascinating study in the potential effectiveness of priestcraft tied to martial discipline.

The Jesuits particularly fascinated Robertson, and none more so than the order's founder, the soldier turned religious leader, Ignatius Loyola. Loyola combined the martial and the spiritual, forming an enthusiasm readily channelled into emulation of 'the glory of the fabulous worthies of the Romish church'. His institutional creation, the Society of the Friends of Jesus, was accordingly neither fish nor fowl, an order of monks engaged in a highly aggressive *vita activa*. The Jesuitical impact on the larger world was as paradoxical as the order was itself. The order proved spectacularly successful, taking root throughout Europe and her colonies, recognised as 'the most able and enterprising order of the church'. Robertson declared them paradoxically 'the most political and *best regulated* of all the monastic orders, and from which mankind have derived more advantages, and received greater injury, than from any other of those religious fraternities.'¹²⁰

The Jesuits are taught to consider themselves as formed for action. They are chosen soldiers, bound to exert themselves continually in the service of God, and of the Pope, his vicar on earth. Whatever tends to instruct the ignorant; whatever can be of use to reclaim or to oppose the enemies of the Holy See, is their proper object. . . . They are required to attend to all the transactions of the world, on account of the influence which these may have upon religion; they are directed to study the dispositions of persons in high rank, and to cultivate their friendship; and by the very constitution, as well as genius of the order, a spirit of action and intrigue is infused into all its members.¹²¹

¹²⁰ *The History of the Reign of The Emperor Charles V*, vol. II, in *Works*, p. 176.

¹²¹ *Charles*, vol. II, pp. 192-3.

Other monastic orders were essentially voluntary associations, with mixed constitutions. Executive power lay with individual Abbés, legislative power in all the members, 'justice' as such through conventual's chapters and general congregations. The Jesuitical 'national character' was determined, as were all others, by the nature of its singular constitution. Robertson, a keen student of ecclesiastical polity, knew full well that religious government was no less crucial than doctrine. However, a far different spirit permeated the order. Jesuitical, like feudal, government, was fundamentally military in organisation.

But Loyola, full of the ideas of implicit obedience, which he had derived from his military profession, appointed that the government of his order should be purely monarchical. A General, chosen for life by deputies from the several provinces, possessed power that was supreme and independent, extending to every person, and to every case. He, by his sole authority, nominated provincials, rectors, and every other officer employed in the government of the society, and could remove them at pleasure. In him was vested the sovereign administration of the revenues and funds of the order. Every member belonging to it was at his disposal; and by his uncontrollable mandate, he could impose on them any task, or employ them in what service so ever he pleased. To his commands they were required not only to yield outward obedience, but to resign up to him the inclinations of their own wills, and the sentiments of their own understandings. They were to listen to his injunctions, as if they had been uttered by Christ himself. Under his direction, they were to be mere passive instruments, like clay in the hands of the potter, or like dead carcasses incapable of resistance. Such a singular form of policy could not fail to impress its character on all the members of the order, and to give a peculiar force to all its operations. There is not in the annals of mankind any example of such perfect despotism, exercised not over monks shut up in cells of a convent, but over men dispersed among all the nations of the earth.¹²²

Robertson was particularly fascinated by the extent to which Loyola was concerned with the socialisation of his followers. Jesuits were created and nurtured according to a precise formula. First the novice needs 'manifest his conscience' to his superior biannually, 'to discover the inclinations, the passions, and the bent of his soul.' The novice was under the strictest of surveillance, and remained so until (crucially) thirty-

¹²² *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 194.

three years of age, upon which he could 'profess' his membership. Jesuit spymasters wrote regular reports on each member, which were sent directly to the general. 'These reports, when digested and arranged, are entered into registers kept on purpose that the General may, at one comprehensive view,' Robertson noted with wonder, and they 'survey the state of society in every corner of the earth; observe the qualifications and talents of its members; and thus chose, with perfect information, the instruments, which his absolute power can employ in any service for which he thinks meet to destine them'.¹²³

The Jesuits had their own perverse variant of civic virtue in abundance. Every Jesuit fought against his personal private passions in favour of the public good, i.e. the good of the order. Indeed, few private citizens of Europe could bear comparison with their ardour and commitment on this score. One could not help but admire the Jesuit commitment to public service. Yet in terms of personal morality, and in particular the personal morality required of statesmen, the Jesuits rationalised and condoned the most cynical casuistry.

As it was for the honour and advantage of the society, that its members should possess an ascendant over the persons in high rank or of great power, the desire of acquiring and preserving such a direction of their conduct, with greater facility, has led the Jesuits to propagate a system of relaxed and pliant morality, which accommodates itself to the passions of men, which justifies their vices, which tolerates their imperfections, which authorizes almost every action that the most audacious or crafty politician would wish to perpetrate.

The Jesuits, as an order, were tied to the interests of their protector, the Vatican. For Robertson, their views on ecclesiastical polity followed accordingly. Citing the article on Jesuits from the *Encyclopedie*, Robertson castigated their general influence. 'Whoever

¹²³ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 194.

recollects the events which have happened in Europe during two centuries,' Robertson somewhat presumptuously declared, 'will find that the Jesuits may justly be considered as responsible for most of the pernicious effects arising from that corrupt and dangerous casuistry, from those extravagant tenets concerning ecclesiastical power, and from that intolerant spirit, which have been the disgrace of the church of Rome throughout that period, and which have brought so many calamities upon civil society.'¹²⁴

The ambitions of the order extended far beyond Europe, and the society made a speciality of overseas missionary activity. In so doing, the Jesuits began to take on more and more the trappings of a great private trading corporation, eventually coming to exercise sovereignty over large indigenous populations. 'They plainly aimed at establishing in Paraguay an independent empire,' Robertson explained, 'subject to the society alone, and which, by the superior excellence of its constitution and police, could scarcely have failed to extend its dominion over all the southern continent of America.' The Jesuit presence in the Americas literally amounted to an empire of expansion. Jesuits instilled fear and dislike of the Spanish and Portuguese, completely isolated the Indians from their officials, created instead an Indian Esperanto.

As all these precautions, without military force, would have been insufficient to have rendered their empire secure and permanent, they instructed their subjects in the European arts of war. They formed them into bodies of cavalry and infantry, completely armed and regularly disciplined. They provided a great train of artillery, as well as magazines stored with all the implements of war. Thus they established an army so numerous and well-appointed, as to be formidable in any country, where a few sickly and ill-disciplined battalions composed all the military force kept on foot by the Spaniards or Portuguese.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 201-202.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 206-207.

Robertson was thus particularly fascinated by how Jesuits had managed to transform savages into beings capable of conducting war as Europeans. As the next chapter will suggest, the historian discerned in the art of war the most telling index of improvement. But Robertson was in no doubt that the Jesuits had achieved something truly remarkable:

They found the inhabitants in a state little different from that which takes place among men when they first begin to unite together; strangers to the arts; subsisting precariously by hunting or fishing; and hardly acquainted with the first principles of subordination and government. The Jesuits set themselves to instruct and civilise these savages. They taught them to cultivate the ground, to rear tame animals, and to build houses. They brought them to live together in villages. They trained them in the arts and manufactures. They made them taste the sweets of society; and accustomed them to the blessings of security and order. These people became the subjects of their benefactors; who have governed them with a tender attention, resembling that, with which a father directs his children. Respected and believed almost to adoration, a few Jesuits presided over some hundred thousand Indians. They maintained a perfect equality among all the members of the community. Each of them was obliged to labour not for himself alone, but for the publick. The produce of their fields, together with the fruits of their industry of every species, were deposited in common storehouses from which each individual received everything necessary for the supply of his wants. By this institution, almost all the passions which disturb the peace of society, and render the members of it unhappy, were extinguished.' ...An admonition from a Jesuit; a slight mark of infamy; or, on some singular occasion, a few lashes of the whip, were sufficient to maintain good order among these innocent and happy people.¹²⁶

The spirit of Moore's *Utopia* can be discerned in Robertson's discussion of 'those innocent and happy people' perhaps even more strongly than the corresponding passages in Hume's *History*. Of course, Robertsonian utopianism, if one may speak of such a thing, was of a distinctly practical bent. Robertson could not help but express a certain envious wonder at the Jesuit missions, keenly aware of the nature of the gauntlet they had thrown down. It is difficult to avoid the ironically Robertsonian point that the Jesuits incited a mild spirit of jealous emulation in the minds of Protestants, a spirit from which historians were not immune. How much more impressive an endeavour were the Jesuit missions than the halting, equivocal efforts of the Scottish SCPK! The following chapter

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 204-205.

will take up the fate of Robertson's understanding of his own most cherished prospect, the spread of the Gospel amongst the American heathen.

Chapter Five: The expansion of corruption?

Part I: Empire and Jealousy of Trade

If Robertson's *Charles V* has been under explored in relation to its political context, the same cannot be said for its sequel, *The History of America*. When Robertson's *America* appeared before the reading public in the year 1777, Britain was deep into what the historian considered a painfully lamentable civil war between the metropolis and her colonies. This concurrence has understandably caused the work to be read in the light of that conflict, both then and now.¹ To an extent, this is entirely justifiable. All of Robertson's historical texts were intended, if not to preach on present party politics, then at least to introduce, contextualise, and provide the framework within which that present might be philosophically approached. Events did intrude upon the historian's publishing timetable. The fact that the published text of *The History of America* addressed the discovery and settlement of the Spanish empire alone, omitting projected sections on British discovery and settlement, was due to the fact that Robertson no longer felt comfortable introducing a present state of affairs so uncertain. Yet, by the point of his decision to omit the British portion of his narrative, he had already composed, as he described with no small amount of chagrin, 'some two hundred pages of excellent history' on the subject.² Yet it is important to bear in mind that a comparative overview of Portuguese, Spanish and British discovery and colonial policy was not Robertson's originally intended project. As discussed in the previous chapter, Robertson had

¹ J. Smitten 'Moderatism and History: William Robertson's Unfinished History of British America' in R. Sher and J.R. Smitten (eds) *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 163-179.

² R. A. Humphreys 'William Robertson and his *History of America*: A Lecture Delivered at Canning House on 11 June 1954' (London), p. 14.

originally intended the content of his eventual American history to be included within the text of his *Charles V*. That he ultimately chose not to include it was an organisational and practical decision. There is little to suggest that the decision was politically motivated. At the time of the conception of *America* as a distinct work, sometime in the early 1760s and before the termination of hostilities with France, there was no perceptible 'American crisis' to address.

More readily discernible was that Britain's colonial possessions had served as the principal *causus belli* for an ultimately successful if unprecedentedly expensive war with France and then with Spain. To the extent that *The History of America* had a dimension that was both responsive to and prescriptive toward the politics of its day it was a text that addressed the problem of how Britain should order her imperial policy in an age of faction and potential overstretch. *The History of America* further problematised how that imperial policy should be re-ordered in an age of economic competition in the New World. The Seven Years War, we shall see, was defended as much for reasons of jealousy of trade as for reasons of balance of power. Thus *America*, perhaps to an even greater extent than *Charles V*, may be seen as an example of the Pufendorfian understanding of modern history as tool for the discernment of the true interest of states. As Robertson declared in his introduction, 'as the principles and maxims of the Spaniards in planting colonies, which have been adopted in some measure by every nation, are unfolded in this part of my work; it will serve as a proper introduction to the history of all the European establishments in America, and convey such information concerning this important article of policy, as may be deemed no less interesting than curious.'³ Like *Charles V*, *America* was intended to have profound implications beyond the events it

³ W. Robertson, *The History of America*, vol. I, in *Works*, p. vi.

narrated. The two works, taken together, served as the introduction to a universal history narrating the development and expansion of a state system that promised to embrace the entire globe.

As discussed in the introduction, the politically prescriptive aspect of the *History of America* has attracted rather less comment than one might have expected for such a patently didactic work. There are a number of plausible explanations for this. First the work has long been the intellectual property of historians of social theory, rather than of the historiography of the enlightenment. Additionally, the recent trajectory of the study of historiography has emphasised the constructed over the ideological aspects of the narratives as narratives. Perhaps most fundamentally, however, historians of the political thought of the Scottish Enlightenment have been more concerned with the commitment of eighteenth century-Scots to the British State than to her overseas holdings. It is generally recognised that the Scottish Enlightenment subjected the Whiggery of its day to a challenging analysis of many of its basic tenets from a perspective both sceptical and sympathetic. How this perspective informed enlightened understanding of the British overseas empire – Hume and Smith excepted – remains relatively under explored. It has even been recently argued that Scottish political discourse on empire is of necessity hostile towards its subject matter.⁴ This raises particular problems in the interpretation of Robertson's most ambitious work, *The History of America*. In Robertson's view, it will here be argued, the European empires may deserve censure for their excesses, but promised to play a crucial role in the spread of civilisation.

There were several contexts within which an eighteenth-century lowland Scot could have viewed the transformative effects of empire. As discussed in chapter three,

⁴ A. S. M. Du Toit, *Patriotism, Presbyterianism, Liberty and Empire*.

the aftermath of the Forty-Five rebellion witnessed a push to complete the project of internal empire *vis à vis* the highlands. The Seven Years War lay bare how deeply empire was embroiled with the economic hostilities between Britain and France. It is widely understood that by the middle of the eighteenth century, commercial empire became primarily a problem of political economy.⁵ Yet Scottish perspectives on the advantages of overseas empire in the context of jealousy of trade did not begin with the eighteenth-century literati. A backward glance at how the matrix of commerce, war and empire first appeared on the Scottish scene may be useful in highlighting the weight of inertia reinforcing the attitudes with which Robertson and others had to contend. The Darien scheme has become a familiar trope both in the historiography of the Union of 1707 and of eighteenth-century 'North-Britishness' generally. The scheme has been presented as the last ditch attempt of an independent Scottish nation to find an economic niche of its own in an increasingly competitive economic field, the failure of which rendered union with England inevitable. What is of more interest here is to demonstrate not only that the rationale behind the scheme rested upon a precocious and sophisticated critique of previous imperial adventures, but also that the anxieties that underpinned the clamour for British war against France throughout the eighteenth century were to a surprising degree continuous with those expressed in late seventeenth-century Scotland.

But while the Scottish vision of empire may well have originated from a realisation of inferiority of position, it certainly did not manifest itself in a defensive posture or course of action. Of course, the *Proposals for a Colony in Darien* was a single text, but it was emblematic of a successful marketing operation that attracted an

⁵ A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1994), ch 5.

astonishing percentage of the available national capital. In any case, Robertson had a professional appreciation of the adventurous spirit of the great speculators.

Scotland, for centuries a nation of emigrants, had been conspicuously slow in establishing a presence in the New World, largely due to its extensive ties with Ulster and the Continent.⁶ By the 1680s, a general concern emerged that Scotland might have missed her opportunity to create settlements in America. The Scottish Parliament, spearheading a concerted national effort, established in 1695 a Company of Scotland with exclusive powers to trade with America, Africa and Asia. William Paterson, the financial speculator instrumental in establishing the Bank of England, and now a director of the new Company, successfully directed it to the possibility of establishing a colony at Darien.⁷ Paterson did not rely on purely economic argument to win over a potentially sceptical Dutch king or an impoverished Scottish population. Every Scot knew that Scottish trade had ground to a halt as a result of King William's defensive crusade against the French king Louis XIV. Paterson's strategy was to argue that preserving the balance of power had as much to do with the restoration of Scottish trade as with conducting a defensive crusade against the French. Invoking the spectre of empire dominated by a papist and infernal Franco-Spanish House of Bourbon, Paterson turned his attention to the Spanish colonial empire.

Paterson opened with a brief historical sketch of the interests of the various European states in the New World. Paterson was acutely aware of the 'great game' aspect to the scramble for possessions in the new world. The pretensions of Spain and Portugal Patterson portrayed as all encompassing as they were ridiculous and even

⁶ Ned C. Landsman, 'Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800', *The American Historical Review*, 104, No. 2 (1999), p. 467.

⁷ T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815* (London, 2003), p. 37.

blasphemous, based as they were on the authority of Rome. He viewed the overseas empires of Charles V and Phillip II through the prism of their twin threats to civil liberties, namely the Inquisition and the spirit of monopoly. Fortunately, in Paterson's analysis, tyranny was inefficient. Spanish avarice and bigotry did not ultimately prove economically advantageous, and allowed the Dutch, from their 'piece of German bog' to undercut the inefficient productions of their slave run mines at every turn. Slave labour proved sufficiently inefficient as to more than double prices. As a result, Spain was left depopulated and on the brink of financial ruin.⁸ The shortsighted Spanish had forgotten the prudent maxim of ancient Rome, that 'people and their industry are the true riches of a prince or nation, insomuch that, in respect of them, all other things are but imaginary.'⁹ Indeed, as Paterson arrestingly put it, 'the Indies may be said rather to have conquered the Spaniards, than that they have conquered the Indies.'¹⁰ However, for Paterson the explanation for Spanish decline was ultimately as much political than economic.

the want of people, the great distance and separation of their dominions, and consequently the occasion of dividing their forces, and of double expense and hazard, great debts upon a mismanagement of the public revenues, and the late accession of power to the nobles or grandees, which have been commonly talked of, and given out for the great and principal causes of the decadency and present low ebb of the monarchy of Spain, are either but very superficial, or only effects of their grasping at such vast dominions, without the so necessary helps of a general naturalisation, liberty of conscience, and a permission trade; -but, on the contrary, they have consumed their nations' and people's spirit and genius by those two unheard of and monstrous monopolies, the one upon the neck of the other, viz. that of the very souls of the Spaniards by their priests, and that again of the Indies by the Spaniards.¹¹

⁸By permitting all to go out and none to come in, they have not only lost the people which are gone to that far distant and luxuriant region, but the remote expectation of so vast advantage hath likewise rendered those that remained almost wholly unprofitable and good for nothing; for there is now-a-days hardly a Spaniard of any spirit but had rather risk his person on an adventure to the Indies, than hazard the staining his gentility by the work and industry of Europe, and thus not unlike the dog in the fable, the Spaniards have in a manner lost their own country, and yet not gotten the Indies'. William Paterson, 'A Proposal to Plant a Colony in Darien, *The Writings of William Paterson* (New York, 1968), pp. 129-30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

To tell the tale of the Spanish troubles in terms of the spread of corruption was to enter into the black legend, where the spirit of the Inquisition extended across vast oceans with increased potency. It was for Paterson a scathing indictment of the lacuna of wisdom among the statesmen of Europe that for so long the spectacular mismanagement of the Spanish Indies was insufficiently understood.¹² The practical importance for Paterson in understanding the extent of Spanish decline was to reassure worried investors that Spain could not be expected to put up serious resistance to a Scottish incursion upon her sphere of influence.

Concerned observers would do better in Paterson's mind to concentrate on the true threat to their commerce, the designs of Louis. France had not as yet cut such an impressive figure in the New World, but that was not for Paterson any particular reason for complaisance. The potential alliance of the vast Iberian holdings in the Americas harnessed to the forces of the French fiscal military state would result in a dangerously

¹² 'And certainly it administers no small cause of wonder that he best and most capable spirits of Christendom have hitherto been so stupid, so dull and little concerned in a matter of so vast weight and consequence, that none of those we commonly call all the politicians of the last two ages have been at any tolerable pains or expense to search into the source and original of this violent evil, this negative kind of destruction, introduced into the rest of the world by their not only new, but new kind of discoveries in the Indies; -that our ancestors, like so many intoxicated fishes and birds in a maze, should so long sleep upon this precipice, and either not think at all, or think themselves secure with this razor at their throats, -so quietly and unconcernedly to see Charles the emperor and Philip his son, even by the untoward way he went to work, from those unparalleled mines within six or eight years to import gold and silver sufficient, not only to conquer, but, by good directions, even to purchase the very property of the rest of Europe; -to suffer Spain, by means of her Indies, during the course of more than an age, besides what they may have done in America, to put the rest of Europe to the expense of so many millions of lives, and so many hundred millions of money; -and that it should be in the nature of the rest of mankind, especially of this nation, within the last fifty years, when it was plainly so very much in their power to make it otherwise, calmly and implicitly to run the risk of the rising of some great prince, or perhaps of some considerable subject of a suitable genius, or other like accident among the Spaniards, -so to new model their Indies, instead of being so much a dead and insupportable burthen and weight to themselves, to become, not only their firm and permanent support, but a most tempting and effective bait to their neighbours, the which, to all human appearance, could not but have had the designed affect'. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133

formidable alliance.¹³ Paterson doubted the possibility of any peaceful coexistence with states notorious for what he saw as bigotry, jealousy, and above all, rank stupidity in the formulation of public policy. The consequences of peaceful coexistence with this Bourbon bloc in the New World would be distinctly unpleasant. Moribund colonial institutions could well be revived. There was every possibility that a Popish free trade zone might be created, dedicated to the elimination of all 'heretical' trading interests from the New World, and disrupting the commerce and prosperity of Europe as a whole.

The very gravity of the situation, Paterson trusted, would prove sufficient to rouse the Protestant bloc into action. The Dutch in particular had created commercial institutions worthy of esteem, and as a result of them the United Provinces had successfully created an overseas commercial empire where they had 'under their command mighty fleets and armies, capable of controlling great potentates, shake kingdoms, remove kings, and give laws to the eastern world, and all this not so much at the labour and expense of their own as that of other people.'¹⁴ In part, Paterson would have been appealing to the vanity of his patron, but the projector seemed to have entertained a genuine admiration for Dutch techniques. English settlements in the Indies certainly held out the promise of great riches, but they had never been properly exploited, nor perhaps their importance properly understood.¹⁵ In a wartime context, a Scottish

¹³ 'It is plain that this potent nation, which now for more than half an age has not only come up with, but outstripped others in several things –but especially in the arts of war, intriguing, and taxing –have been far enough from having the same success in matters of trade, and in designs to those more remote places of the world. So it is hoped that Almighty God hath better things in store for the rest of mankind than can possibly consist with a measure of knowledge and capacity suitable to the opportunity now in their hands, by the means of this their new conjunction with Spain and Portugal'. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁵ 'These plantations, which have already contributed so much to the wealth and support of this nation, and at this time look as especially prepared by the Divine hand as harbingers to prepare the way for so great a work as seems now to be ready and ripe for execution, have not, as some have vainly imagined, sprung from the deep contrivances or designs of any one, or a party of men, but from various causes, at several

empire would now be consciously designed to provoke the Spanish deliberately and confound their commercial aims. Paterson was well aware that his proposals to found a Scottish colony at Darien (the isthmus of Panama) would be seen by the Spanish as a naked land grab.

Paterson's apologia for what would clearly be seen by the Spanish as a breach of the law of nations was twofold: firstly, Spanish claims to sovereignty rested upon a theological reading of the power of the papacy to grant *dominium* not universally shared, and secondly, King William would allow all to trade there 'upon reasonable terms.' Reasonable terms could well be negotiated, but the fact would remain that Scotland would now be in control of a new 'universal dominion' in the form of Atlantic commerce.

Thus these doors of the seas and the keys of the universe would of course be capable of enabling their possessors to give laws to both oceans, and to become the arbitrators of the commercial world, without being liable to the fatigues, expenses, and dangers, or of contracting such guilt and blood, as Alexander and Caesar; since, as in theirs and all other empires that have been anything universal, the conquerors have at least been obliged to seek out their conquests from far; so the force and universal influence of those attractive magnets are such as can much more effectually bring home to the proprietors' doors.¹⁶

Not only would the new Scottish *imperium* of the seas prove morally above reproach, it would be far more enduring as a result.

Of course, in the end, the scheme was a spectacular disaster, partly because of inhospitable conditions, but even more fundamentally, because Paterson misread William's level of enthusiasm for carrying out war with Spain. The Bourbon alliance Paterson dreaded did not materialise, and William was unwilling to intentionally provoke

times; and, to say the truth, rather from our own or other people's weakness than from real virtue or good conduct in the preceding age.' *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

a valuable ally in his struggle against Louis for the sake of a faraway swamp. 'I have been very ill served in Scotland' was his considered assessment of the plan.¹⁷

The very devastation the Darien scheme wreaked upon the moneyed and landed interests of Scotland does allow a few general observations upon the relationship Scots of that period aspired towards with overseas empire. It certainly had a strongly defensive component; Scottish commercial empire was desired as a bulwark against a militant Catholic universal empire that would, if ultimately successful, give law to all Europe and undermine civil and religious liberties. That sense of defensiveness, however, was a response to the large Catholic monarchies of the continent; it was not, at this period, uniquely focused on English hostility.¹⁸ More important, a psychologically defensive posture did not in any sense lead to hostility toward imperial speculation – quite the reverse. Defensiveness gave rise to a rather powerful desire to emulate the successful, to seek advantage in a highly competitive international arena. Behind this lay the zero sum understanding of competition Smith would later condemn as 'mercantilist'. Colonies required military backing because trade was seen as a form of property that could be stolen. It was within this context of jealous that eighteenth-century Scots would come to overwhelmingly embrace what became a British empire, 'protestant, maritime, commercial, and free.'¹⁹

Pragmatic Scottish embrace of the opportunities provided by English overseas possessions did not arrive all of a sudden. While the collapse of the Darien adventure

¹⁷ Devine, *Scotland's Empire*, p. 47.

¹⁸ for a contrary view see A. Du Toit 'Who are the Barbarians? Scottish Views of Conquest and Indians and Robertson's *The History of America*' *Scottish Literary Journal*, 26 (1999), p. 31.

¹⁹ D. Amitage, 'The Scottish vision of Empire: The Intellectual Origins of the Darien Adventure' in J. Robertson (ed.) *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 97-118.

ended all prospects for an economically viable independent Scotland in the eyes of perceptive observers, Union with England was hardly a popular option. Scots negotiators insisted that investors in the Darien project be compensated for their losses with interest. The Unionism that subsequently gained in influence was powerfully supported by Presbyterians who saw in the Treaty of 1707 the only realistic defence of the true Kirk against popish universal monarchy. Yet confessional allegiance linked with economic concerns, above all with the promise that Scotland could best pursue her interests within the context of a Great Britain that would most truly come to be across the seas.²⁰ As the eighteenth century progressed, such perspectives ceased to be the preserve of speculative ideology, and became observable reality. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Scottish emigration to the Americas became substantial.²¹ The success of the Chesapeake tobacco trade had by this time transformed the economy of the city of Glasgow into one of the great emporia of the Atlantic.²² Scots were disproportionately represented as colonial administrators and governors, as well as in the armies and navies stationed in the new world. Ned Landsman has sketched out the attitudes of this Scottish imperial elite, who remained deeply committed to imperial union, yet had their own understanding of how that imperial union should best be administered. As seen in Chapter three, evangelicals, particularly in the West of Scotland, would look to religious awakenings in the Northern colonies for inspiration against a Presbyterian establishment many had come to consider as fundamentally Erastian and corrupt.

²⁰ D. Armitage, 'Making the Empire British: Scotland in the Atlantic World 1542-1707', *Past and Present* 155 (May 1997), pp. 34-63; John Robertson 'An Elusive Sovereignty: The Course of the Union Debate in Scotland, 1698-1707,' in Robertson, ed., *A Union for Empire*, pp 198-228.

²¹ N. Landsman, 'Nation, Migration, and the Province,' in Robertson (ed) *A Union for Empire*, p. 185.

²² T. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords* (Edinburgh, 1984).

Scotland's economic and military relationship with overseas empire rendered her intelligentsia particularly sensitive to the afterlife of Paterson's understanding of the relationship between commerce and empire as played out in subsequent mercantilist wars between Britain and France in the Americas. Whether economic nationalism was ever the primary motivation of individual statesmen in moving their respective states towards war, it was certainly deployed to defend such conflicts as the Seven Years War.

The declaration of war in 1756 was not an auspicious occasion for polite discourse on enlightened commercial policy. If the Scottish press buzzed yet again with reports of French invasions that never quite materialised, literature emerging from London took great pains to drive home the dire effects of such a disaster. An impeccably bigoted and alarmist little tract, *The Progress of the French in their views of Universal Monarchy* sought to frighten the public into support of hostile measures against France. The pamphlet's stated intent placed it squarely within the genre of Whig writings on the subject, namely 'to justify the Conduct of our Ministry in their present Hostilities against France; to raise the Resentment of all true Britons, all Lovers of their Country, its Religion, Liberties, and Laws; to excite the Animosity of all the Patrons of our Trade and Commerce; and to set before the Eyes of all Europe, what they have to expect from that insolent Power France, if it be suffered to run its Career of Violence and Robbery, without Check or Controul'.²³

The author began with the assertion that France, that 'ambitious, perfidious, restless, bigotted, persecuting, plundering Power' in aspiring after universal monarchy, sought to regain Charlemagne's empire on the continent. As discussed in the previous

²³ *The Progress of the French, in their views of Universal Monarchy* (London, 1756), p. 1.

chapter, this was the brand of folkish Gallophobia Robertson felt had so poisoned the British discussion of the balance of power. Such militant Whiggish understanding of imperial conflict in its economic aspect manifested itself in a narration of the history of the jealousy of trade. This parallel narrative borrowed – indeed could be seen as a variant of – the folk legend of the sequence of attempts toward universal monarchy. The polemical intent was to stoke up vigilance against foreign threats while reinforcing correct ideas of liberty. Whereas the ‘historiography’ of universal monarchy naturally began with the novel aspirations of the Emperor Charles V, jealousy of trade first presented the reader with the sinister machinations of Cardinal Richelieu and their threat to the European balance. ‘Richelieu,’ the pamphlet advanced,

seems to have been the first, who projected the raising a naval Power in *France*, and the Extension of its Dominions. For this End, Colonies were to be planted, Fisheries to be encouraged, and Commerce to be promoted. But in the mean Time, 'twas necessary to give *England* a Soporific, -to lull her to Rest; in Consequence of which, a *Dallilah* was sent over to bind *Sampson* and shear his Locks. A Daughter of *France* was married to Charles I. of *England*; and at this Marriage, several Stipulations were agreed on, in Favour of the Commerce of *France*, by which the Trade, Strength, and Riches of this Nation were to be sap'd. Every true *Britain* saw it, and whisper'd to himself, *Timeo Danaos & donna ferentes*.²⁴

The narrative of jealousy of trade thus also served as a useful stick with which to beat the house of Stuart, criticised as equally negligent towards the threat of French commerce as to that of French territorial expansion. The most telling degree to which England had fallen behind France was the fact that the balance of trade reached a deficit of £1,600,000. The very fact that the French economy underwent a period of destabilising inflation was nothing but a cunning ploy to undercut British imports.²⁵ Commerce might

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 3.

²⁵ ‘Tis true, this caused great Convulsions in the Kingdom at first, but in the Issue, it has been the Instrument by which they have sapped the Foundations of our Trade; and if a Remedy be not applied, which is every Day at hand, viz. a *Bounty*, this Artifice of the *French* will worm out *British* Manufactures by gentle Degrees in every Market in the World. By this Artifice they have rendered

now have become a reason of state, but a true Briton would do well to remember what at all times was the end of French policy:

Conquest is the Design of the *French*; Trade is only attended to as the Instrument. Surely all *Europe* ought to unite against these Plunderers of the World, and Bullies of Mankind, who sacrifice every Thing to their savage Ambition. And as to *England*, they have attacked our Settlements in the *East Indies*, robbed us of our Territories in the *West Indies*, plundered our Colonies, murdered our People, violated our solemn Treaties, by seizing the neutral Islands, and committing Hostilities against us in every Quarter of the Globe. Arise, O *Britain*! Avenge thy Cause, and restrain the Rapine and Violence of these Disturbers of the World.²⁶

The vigilant Briton, the pamphlet further argued, would do equally well to remember the certain result of such a conquest. French ambitions were as dangerous to the Protestant faith as they were to Britain herself. Indeed, lack of vigilance in resisting economic subordination to the French would lead to the grim Armageddon of the destruction of the Protestant faith. National defence thus required repeated reminders as to the singular unattractiveness of the popish creed. 'As to the Religion of the *French*, it is a System of Pageantry, Buffoonery, Foolery, Stupidity, Idolatry, Blasphemy and Cruelty, all mix'd together, and work'd up with Blood; fit only for stupid Fools and impertinent unthinking Buffoons.' The confessional charge of imperial polemic emerged even more strongly when the author turned towards Spain and the nature of Spanish holdings in the Americas. One could not in practice separate economic aggression from the Inquisition.

To the extent that one can speak of a worldview common to an enlightened republic of letters, it was one of antipathy to this manner of pugilistic political economy. How David Hume attempted to propagate the new commandment to love thy neighbours' economy as thine own was a theme of Chapter four. It is a thesis of this chapter that an

their Labour so cheap, that they reap a plentiful Harvest in every country, *where they pay the same Customs as the English*, whilst the *English* Merchant is obliged to wait for the Gleanings of the Market, after the *Frenchman* has finished his Sales.' *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

enlightened cosmopolitan history of the rise of commercial empire would face as a principal challenge the fact that such empires caused potentially destabilising conflicts between their parent nations. As seen in the previous chapter, the exorbitant cost of the Seven Years War not only toppled a ministry but also threatened the very solvency of the British state. Robertson was not the first historian of European reputation to try to come to terms with the problem of how to write a history of new commercial policy that now regulated the war and diplomacy of nations. To Robertson's great chagrin, that honour belonged to the *History of the Two Indies* (1770) by the Abbé Raynal.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of Raynal's work was its spectacular commercial and critical success; it went through thirty-six editions in the original French, and through eighteen in the English translation of J. Justamond. A German translation went through three editions, and the work was additionally translated into Spanish and Dutch. *The Monthly Review* of November 1776 declared,

It may suffice, to inform such of our Readers as are still unacquainted with the work, that the manner in which it is executed is masterly, as the materials of which it is composed are important, and the periods and countries of which it treats are interesting; and that there are few works in which the different excellencies of historical narrative and philosophical disquisition are so happily united. Strength of thought, vivacity of diction, and liberality of sentiment, are its leading characteristics, and render it one of the most pleasing historical productions of the present age....We have only to express our regret that the Abbé Raynal has followed the example of his countrymen, in not giving his authorities for the principal facts which he relates: on omission, which, however fashionable, we cannot but think is an essential defect in any historical work.²⁷

From both a literary and a commercial calculus, it was undeniable that the Scottish historian's thunder was stolen in the most spectacular fashion. Robertson seemed to realise as much as he remarked in a letter to his French translator, Suard,

²⁷ *The Monthly Review*, Vol LV, (November, 1776), p. 402.

M. Hume and all *savans* here have read it with great eagerness. It is truly a work of great merit, of deep research and extraordinary eloquence. I shall derive much information from it in the work which I am carrying on, and though I am mortified with observing that the author has sometimes occupied ground which I fancied was entirely my own, I shall receive a full compensation for this by the pleasure as well as information which he has conveyed to me. I regret, however, that he has not quoted any other in support of the facts which he produces, nor mentioned the sources from which he derives his knowledge of some very important particulars.²⁸

It is difficult to gauge this letter with any precision. As argued in the previous chapter *vis à vis* Voltaire, Robertson was far more likely to fault the referencing of works with which he had other and more fundamental disagreements. As we shall see from a brief discussion of the work itself, *The History of the Two Indies* was hardly a performance Robertson could have been expected to approve without qualification. Yet Robertson would have been well aware not only of the friendship between Suard and Raynal, but also and perhaps more importantly of the debt he owed them both in the successful reception of his *Charles V*. Raynal had been part of that Parisian circle in which Hume had successfully 'sold' his compatriot as an author deserving of a European reputation. To attack the work would have been not only impolitic but also ungrateful. By the same token, Robertson was far too advanced in his project to abandon it; there was little choice but to put the bravest face possible on the situation and proceed as planned.

Deux Indes has been a problematic text for modern scholarship due to the fact that it evolved in the most spectacular fashion between its first and final eighteenth-century editions. Most secondary scholarship has focused on its increasingly incendiary later editions, where its secondary author Dennis Diderot provided most of the philosophical and political fireworks. Raynal became in the meantime as much editor as author of a grand, sprawling, and rather incoherent *Encyclopédie* of the totality of the European

²⁸ Robertson to Suard, 21 February, 1773, in *New Monthly Magazine*, . XIII, pt I, pp. 9-10, op. cit. in J. Smitten 'Robertson's letters and the life of writing' in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, p. 45.

imperial experience. While the text by Raynal that first appeared in 1770 in French and 1776 in English was yet to be adorned with those purple patches that were later to create 'fanatics of liberty' among the French revolutionaries, it was nonetheless a text that diverged sharply with Robertson's own preferences concerning sources, and as often, message. While it would be beyond the scope of the present chapter to trawl Raynal's text for every opinion or bit of information that might have interested Robertson during his researches, a few points are of direct relevance to the themes Robertson pursued in his own work on the same subject.

Raynal can in the first instance be seen as a participant in a distinctly French tradition of colonial discourse, seeking to answer Montaigne's fundamental question concerning overseas empire from the essay 'Of Cannibals', namely whether it could ever justify the amount of blood and treasure it occasioned.²⁹ Raynal further transmitted the Montaignian theme of importing Tacitus' inversion of the civilised and the barbarian into the relationship between the European and the Native American. There was for Raynal no denying that the moment of discovery was itself an event of cardinal importance, but whether the results of this exciting moment amounted to progress was another matter. 'Everything has changed, and must change again,' Raynal mused. 'But it is a question, whether the revolutions that are passed, or those which must hereafter take place, have been, or can be of any utility to the human race? Will they ever add to the tranquillity, the happiness, and the pleasures of mankind? Can they improve our present state, or do they only change it?'³⁰ Raynal's text thus questioned whether the age of discovery stood

²⁹ M. de Montaigne, 'Of Cannibals' *The Complete Essays*, edited by M. A. Screech (London, 1991) pp. 228-241

³⁰ Raynal *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlement and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, translated by J. Justamond (London, 1776), vol. I, p. 2.

at the pinnacle of any development within European history. The French historian was thus free in a way Robertson would not be, to condemn roundly and unproblematically the initial Spanish invasions, conquests, and foolish policies as corrupt and above all backward. This position could not but inform scholarly decisions concerning the assessment of sources. Raynal dismissed out-of-hand as hopelessly self-serving the 'imperialist' conquest chronicles of Cortés, de Solís and Herrera that Robertson was to rely on extensively.

While it would be misleading to characterise Raynal as unremittingly hostile to every development that emerged as a result of the discovery of the New World, the French historian argued that the original crimes of conquest had led to the continuing criminality of wars needed to maintain them. Raynal saw these wars as the culmination of centuries of European policy preoccupied with preserving the balance of Europe against would-be hegemonies. The logic of war based upon preservation of the balance of trade was the unfortunate legacy of centuries of paranoid preoccupation over universal monarchy. Raynal's overview was remarkably Robertsonian; the threat had always been more apparent than real, and this fundamental misapprehension had begun with Charles V. 'The ambition, the talents, and the rivalry of Charles the fifth, and Francis the first' Raynal wrote, 'gave rise to the present system of modern politics.'³¹ Europe divided between proponents of Habsburg and those of Valois. Charles' son Phillip attempted to take on the task of his father, but Phillip was too narrow in his strategy to fulfil the task, too much Rome's man to stake out an independent policy. Richelieu's France thus rose at Spain's expense, which led in turn to European fears that Louis XIV was the first

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 435.

monarch since Charles V to have a realistic opportunity to pursue universal monarchy.

These fears were illusory; Raynal explained that

Charles the fifth had been accused of aiming at universal monarchy; and Lewis the 14th was taxed with the same ambition. But neither of them ever conceived so high and so rash a project. They were both of them passionately desirous of extending their empire, by aggrandizing their families. This ambition is equally natural to princes of the ordinary cast, who are born without talents, as it is to monarchs of a superior understanding, who have neither virtue or morals. But neither Charles the fifth, nor Lewis the fourteenth had that kind of determination, that impulse of the soul to brave everything, which makes conquerors of heroes: they had nothing of Alexander in them. Nevertheless useful alarms were taken and spread abroad. Such alarms cannot be too soon thought of, nor too soon spread, when there arise any powers that are formidable to their neighbours. It is chiefly among nations, and with respect to kings, that fear produces safety.³²

Raynal here employed the strategy of Robertson's *Charles V*, to lessen the fear of Bourbon aggression by showing how the threat of universal monarchy had been consistently misunderstood. The often-made connection between Charles V and Louis XIV was not groundless as long as one bore in mind that both were princes of the modern workaday sort who did what all princes sought to do, extend their dynastic influence. True, Louis had proved formidable through divided opposition, but this was soon corrected in the normal manner through the successful policy of William of Orange. The policies of Charles and Louis were ultimately as traditional in outlook as Britain's were revolutionary, namely the creation of a universal monarchy of the seas.

While the powers of the continent measured and parcelled out Europe into unequal portions, which policy by leagues, treaties and alliances always kept in equilibrium; a maritime people formed as it were a new system, and by its industry made the land subject to the sea, as if nature herself has done by her laws. It formed, or unfolded that extensive commerce, the basis of which is an excellent agriculture, flourishing manufactures, and the richest possessions of the four quarters of the world. This is the kind of universal monarchy that Europe ought to wrest from England, in restoring to each maritime state that freedom, and that power it hath a right to have upon the element that surrounds it. This is a system of public good formed upon natural equity, and in this case justice is the voice of general interest.³³

³² *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 437.

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 441.

The tables had turned in Europe, and the old protector of the European balance now emerged through its jealous commercial policies as its greatest threat. Raynal did not at all times seem to share Robertson's understanding of the balance of power as the balanced capacities of states to wage war, but rather as so many flimsy agreements cobbled out to reflect the results of the last battle. The French historian thus had no reason to assume that the freedom of the seas would sort itself out as a result of the natural jealousy and emulation of relatively equal states.³⁴ British pursuit of their universal dominion meant continual war that threatened the stability of British government.³⁵ Raynal, unlike Robertson, thus had a specific purpose in taking his narrative up to the present and the Seven Years War, which the French historian followed Voltaire in understanding to have begun with Britain's novel ambition for universal monarchy on the American continent.³⁶

For Raynal the freedom of European trade relied in practice upon the hit and miss nature of British policy in the Americas. The causes of Britain's disastrous performance during the first half of the war lay in her over reliance on sea power, in the lack of

³⁴ 'Perhaps even this system of equality may be nothing more than a chimera. The balance can only be fixed by treaties, and treaties can have so solidity, when they are only made between monarchs, and not between nations. These acts ought to bind the people themselves, because the object of them is their peace and safety, which are the greatest good: but a despot always sacrifices his subjects to his anxiety, and his engagements to his ambition.' *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 440-441.

³⁵ 'During almost two centuries that have passed since the English established themselves in North America, their country has been harassed by expensive and bloody wars; thrown into confusion by enterprising and turbulent parliaments; and governed by a bad and corrupt ministry, ever ready to raise the power of the crown upon the ruin of all the privileges and rights of the people. But notwithstanding the influence of ambition, avarice, faction, and tyranny, the liberty of the colonies to raise their own taxes for the support of the public revenue hath on all hands been acknowledged and regarded.' *Ibid.*, vol. IV, 378.

³⁶ 'They [The British] began hostilities in the year 1755, by attacking the French upon the confines of Canada; and, without any previous declaration of war, they took above three hundred merchant ships, just as if they were vessels that carried on a contraband trade . . . Lewis XIV had been reproached with an ambition which aimed at universal monarchy; Lewis XV made it appear that the English aimed at being monarchs of the sea in effect. All nations then wished to see the power of England reduced, as they had before desired to see the pride of Lewis XIV humbled.' Voltaire, *The Age of Lewis XIV* (Glasgow, 1763), p. 356. Voltaire did not hold that the French government had any particularly compelling claim to their holdings in the America, however.

adaptiveness of the military to the American terrain, and above all, her utter inability to engage profitably with the native population. As a historian hostile to this manner of conducting a commercial war, Raynal was keen to point out that the failure of the British to value sufficiently the worth of the indigenous natives was a strategic as well as a moral failing.

These nations had always shewn a visible partiality for the French, in return for the kindness they had shewn them in sending them missionaries, whom they considered rather as ambassadors from the prince, than as sent from God. These missionaries, by studying the language of the savages, conforming to their temper and inclinations, and putting in practice every attention to gain their confidence, had acquired an absolute dominion over their minds. The French colonists, far from communicating the European manners, had adopted those of the country they lived in: their indolence in time of peace, their activity in war, and their constant fondness for a wandering life. Several officers of distinction had got themselves incorporated with them. The hatred and jealousy of the English has vilified them on this account, and they have not scrupled to assert that these generous men had given money for the skulls of their enemies, that they joined in the horrid dances that accompany the execution of their prisoners, imitated their cruelties, and partook of their barbarous festivals. But these horrid excesses would be better adapted to people who have substituted national to religious fanaticism, and are more inclined to hate other nations than love their own government.³⁷

‘The Indians pursued the English with as much eagerness as they did the wild beasts’, Raynal wrote. ‘Glory was no longer their aim in battle, their only object was slaughter.’ Raynal’s brief narrative of the remainder of the conflict put as brave a face on French losses as possible. In the French historian’s conclusion to his discussion of British colonisation, he dispensed advice on how they could best be reformed. He approved of the imposition of English justice upon the province, though he was sceptical of the efficacy of any attempt to impose English manners. ‘The only things necessary to make the colony prosper, are that its lands should be cleared, its forests cut down, its iron mines worked, its fisheries extended, its industry and exportations improved.’ Raynal was

³⁷ Raynal, *Two Indies*, vol. IV, pp. 149-150.

more generally pessimistic concerning the effects of wars such as the Seven Years War on the colonies and the colonial powers who waged them. Such wars, in Raynal's view, were fought to support the narrow interests of exclusive companies and their jealous spirit of monopoly. The cost of such wars would always prove too much for private investment to sustain, and thus the financial burdens of such private companies would always in the end have to borne by governments. This was a bad investment on the part of governments, who seldom recouped their losses through taxation or export duties.³⁸

Raynal's discussion of the corrupting effects of conquest upon the conqueror was even more pertinent to Robertson's projected narrative. Raynal was fascinated by the change in manners Europeans had experienced through their contact with the savage. Ease of victory and riches too readily attained corrupted the manners of the Portuguese. In such a depraved state, the very religious zeal that had previously been the spring of their vigour now yielded nothing but wanton ferocity. The Portuguese, viewing the Indians as idolaters, saw it as their privilege to rob and enslave them. The habit of treating others in such a manner soon became entrenched; the Portuguese were now no better able to trust each other than they were to trust the indigenous people. Faction became rampant, and effective administration was the first thing to suffer. 'There prevailed everywhere in their manners a mixture of avarice, debauchery, cruelty, and devotion.' Collapse of virtue led necessarily to the decline and fall of good government.

The chiefs, and principal officers, admitted to their table a multitude of those singing and dancing women, with which India abounds. Effeminacy introduced itself into their houses and armies. . . That brilliant courage, which had subdued so many nations, existed no longer among them. The Portuguese were with difficulty brought to fight, except where there was a prospect of plunder. . . Such corruption prevaded their finances, that the tributes of sovereigns, the revenues of provinces, which ought to have been immense, the taxes they

³⁸ W. R. Womack, 'Eighteenth-century themes in the *Historie philosophique et politique des deux Indes* of Guillaume Raynal, in *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 96 (Oxford, 1972) p. 153.

levied in gold, silver and spices, on the inhabitants of the continent and islands, were not sufficient to keep a few citadels, and to fit out the shipping that was necessary for the protection of trade. It is a melancholy view to contemplate the fall of nations.³⁹

This was to view the decline of European empire as analogous to the decline and fall of Rome. The vigour of the Portuguese had been sapped through a degradation of the warrior ethic, luxury and personal licentiousness. Robertson was to employ a variant of this model in his own discussion of the corruption of the Spanish in the Americas, though he was to go beyond Raynal in providing explanation for how this cycle of decline came to repeat itself. For Raynal's part, though he at no point provided a developed account of the transformation of the European personality in a savage environment, he did provide hints of what had happened. He suggested that the sheer temptation of far-flung lands as booty to be pillaged had proved too great to be resisted, that the absence of the sort of restraint the European would have felt at home had unleashed a barbarism deeper than that displayed by the Indians.

Raynal did not feel that Britain had any special immunity from this dynamic of moral regression. In the British case, corruption stemmed from the behaviour of an imperial merchant class that largely dictated British policy.⁴⁰ The rapaciousness of this set of men manifested itself in a policy of exploitation more refined but no less pernicious than that of the much vilified Spanish. The resistance of the colonists themselves would meet this tyranny. Raynal held that colonies should certainly pursue their own interest, but not to the point of declaring their independence of the home country. Nor would it be

³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 115.

⁴⁰ 'The greatest injury to liberty arises from a set of ambitious men, who pursuing an interest distant from that of the public and of posterity, are wholly bent on increasing their credit, their rank, and their estates. The British ministry, from whom they have produced employments, or expect to receive from them, finds them always ready to favour their odious projects, by the contagion of their luxury and their vices; by their artful insinuations, and by the flexibility of their conduct.' *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 382.

in the interest of European states with colonial possessions act to speed this likely development. First, independent colonies would most likely prove bolder in threatening the interest of their own neighbours. Second, and perhaps more importantly, such a revolution in affairs would no doubt serve as a model for other Creole populations. Raynal, in short, did not see it as in the French interest to encourage the American colonies in revolution, as the result would no doubt be to create new states that would be even more formidable rivals than the previous colonies had been while under British dominion. Raynal did not however see it as within France's power to prevent this general turning of the tide against the Europeans in their far-flung territories. 'Everything,' he wrote, 'conspires to produce this great disruption, the area of which it is impossible to know. Everything tends to this point: the progress of good in the New Hemisphere, and the progress of evil in the old.'⁴¹ Raynal did not believe that Creole revolt and the consequent rupture of the European system was inevitable, but he held there was little ground for optimism.

While there was much in Raynal's analysis with which Robertson would agree, his was a troubling reading of the international order. In Raynal's telling, the impetus of European colonisation was not only avarice but also an imperial and persecuting dynamic at the heart of Christianity. The history of European conquest and settlement was a tawdry sequence of war crimes and atrocities that had as devastating an effect on the morals of the conquerors as they had on the lives of the conquered. Furthermore, imperial commerce had been seized upon as a principal reason of state in the jealous rivalries between the European powers and thus served as a catalyst of a series of wars that threatened to sap the financial strength of the combatants. Perhaps the best that

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 390.

could be hoped for, if one accepted Raynal's logic, would be that Creole populations would revolt and thus save European economies from default. One can thus see why Hume would have found Raynal such a compelling read, just as one can see how Robertson would have found the book a frustrating encounter. Robertson was a patriotic North-Briton who understood as well as any of his contemporaries that the strength of all the regions of Britain lay in her foreign commerce. He would have found it a particularly bitter pill to have Britain's imperial ambitions characterised as a bid for universal monarchy that required the collective will of enlightened Europe to counterpoise. Robertson had hoped that the Bute ministry's controversial peace of 1763 had put an end to Britain's territorial ambitions in the Americas, and to have successfully communicated this fact to the rest of Europe. He had written his *Charles V* partly as an intervention in public discourse to facilitate just such a realisation and acceptance.

Yet there was much in Raynal's analysis that Robertson was to build upon. The historian would end up paraphrasing much of Raynal's narrative of the misdeeds of the Spanish, even if he would be keen to emphasise those misdeeds as those of particular men, and not of the Spanish state or of the Christian religion. Robertson would further agree to many of the particular reforms Raynal advocated, above all an end to commercial monopolies and their jealous notions of commerce that had done so much to misdirect the imperial policies of Europe. But above all Raynal held out an inspiring example of an attempt to comprehend European empire in all its foibles and successes as a coherent whole.

Robertson's great historical ambition to bind the disparate histories of European colonisation together was frustrated by the fact that he failed to complete his project.

While it has been advanced at the beginning of this chapter that the ‘American crisis’ was not an original impetus to Robertson’s historical interest in empire, it certainly conditioned the form his published writings on the subject were to take. On 4 July, 1776, the political consequences of Bute’s peace became apparent; the Continental Congress of the thirteen American colonies declared themselves independent of Parliament. Raynal’s grim prediction had come to pass. Shortly thereafter, on 26 August 1776, Robertson wrote to his long-time literary benefactor the Earl of Hardwicke:

I had determined to defer publishing part of my *History of America* until the whole was completed. But the unfortunate situation into which we have got ourselves with our colonies obliges me to alter that resolution. It is impossible to give any discussion of their political or commercial situation, or to enter upon any speculation concerning them while the conflict remains undecided. Instead of a History, one could only write a conjecture on actions required of the day. For whatever way the dispute terminates a new state of things must be introduced into British America. The colonies must either become independent states, or be reduced to a more perfect dependence than formerly. It becomes necessary then to wait for some time before one can publish anything concerning them.⁴²

As a citizen, Robertson had contradictory views concerning this development; as an historian it was an unmitigated disaster. Robertson had intended his *History of America* to be a panoramic survey of all the European empires as a guide to the statesmen of Europe; this was not now possible. Robertson intended his histories as guides to statesmen and magistrates, and this was untenable in the context of civil war and the dissolution of government. The manner of counsel Robertson sought to provide his readers always lay more in a deeper understanding of the principles that guided policy than the minutia of policy itself. Therefore the portion of his history that Robertson did choose to publish took on added resonances. He believed that he needed to publish what he did have on Portugal and Spain quickly, while ‘all the attention not only of Great

⁴² Robertson to the Earl of Hardwicke, 26 August 1776. (Hardwicke MSS. BL, Add.35350, ff. 60-61).

Britain but all Europe is turned to America, and ... renders every publication concerning it interesting.'⁴³ Robertson, taking the political advice he often dispensed, seized the opportunity to release his finished volumes on Spain. Of particular importance to release at this critical juncture was his 'large detail of the state of the Spanish settlements, and their principles of colonisation which have served as our model, and that of all other nations in their establishments in the new world.'⁴⁴ The history of Spanish colonisation would thus serve as the history of European colonisation in microcosm. As such, it could go some way towards fulfilling the task he had intended his larger unfinished work to fulfil, namely to instruct British statesmen, both in London and in colonial positions in the true nature of their project. Contrary to Robertson's intentions, however, *The History of America* assumed a more immediate import than its author had intended, to influence the course of state policy in time of war.

Part II: The Progress of Civilisation, Conquest, and Settlement

The text of the *History of America* was an advance on that of *Charles V* in its formal complexity. The eight books of the text of *The History of America* comprise four distinct

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

styles of narrative, not all of which sit comfortably together. Book I contextualised European discovery and conquest within a broader narrative of the progress of civilisation. Books II, III, V and VI are narrative history of a discernibly neo-classical provenance, even if their subject matter of discovery and conquest seem far removed from classical models, and are written in a manner that moves beyond neo-classical purity and elegance. Books IV and VII were pioneering exercises in historical jurisprudence aimed at revealing the spirit of the savage law of war. The eighth and final book was a survey of Spanish policy with recommendations on its reform. This final book, it will be suggested, constituted the programmatic core of the work that binds together its disparate elements to offer the statesmen of Europe instruction in the art of imperial governance.

Book I can be seen as serving on a more modest scale a parallel function for the remainder of the text of *America* as the *View* had done for Charles V, by providing a universalising context for the more detailed and localised narrative to follow. The neo-stoic teleology was the same, the progress of scattered disorder to organised, vigorous action. The effect of this revival of vigour was to draw disparate peoples together in new forms of interaction. As discussed in chapter three, Robertson strongly hinted at the post-millennial implications of this development. Yet, perhaps in keeping with the greater theological importance of the events to be narrated, Robertson made more frequent and powerful allusions to the guiding hand of providence. Alone amongst Robertson's works, *The History of America* began with the Creation. Robertson promptly proceeded to sharply distinguish between the ancient and the modern motivation to discover. Whereas the ancients had been drawn to empire by the prospect of conquest, primarily by land,

moderns were driven by views of commercial interest. This schema is complicated, however, if read in parallel with the opening of the *View of the Progress of Society*, where Robertson had spelled out that Western history had its Old and New Testaments, those developments that led to the rise of the Roman empire and those developments that led from its collapse and the rise of a European states system in its wake. Book I can be read as the progress of the latter over the former spring of discovery, a phenomenon that had occurred twice in western history.

If discovery was for Robertson an event in the sacred history of mankind, it was in the first instance an event in the history of commercial transactions. The prerequisite of commerce was navigation. 'It is from this area,' Robertson remarked, 'that we must date the commencement of such an intercourse between nations as deserves the appellation of commerce.' In terms that prefigured more modern developments, Robertson extolled the contribution made by commercial values to the progress of ancient civilisation. Commerce and navigation had led to a new sociability between nations. 'The desire of gain became a new incentive to activity, roused adventurers, and sent them forth upon long voyages, in search of countries, whose products or wants might increase that circulation which nourishes and gives vigour to commerce'. 'Trade proved a great impetus to discovery,' Robertson extolled, 'it opened unknown seas, into new regions, and contributed more than any other cause to bring men acquainted with the situation, the nature, and commodities of the different parts of the globe.'⁴⁵

In the light of the eagerness of modern commentators to congratulate the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment for banishing the Lycurgus myth, that lasting constitutions owed their genius to that of their original heroic founders,

⁴⁵ Robertson, *The History of America*, vol. I, p. 5.

Robertson's celebration of men who both personified and reinforced the spirit of the age was remarkable. Robertson discerned the guiding hand of providence through the endeavours of extraordinary new personages, and in doing so managed, nominally, to give the historical perspective of Voltaire a Presbyterian gloss. This is most evident in his curious and controversial discussion of Alexander the Great.

That extraordinary man, notwithstanding the violent passions which incited him, at some times, to the wildest actions, and the most extravagant enterprises, possessed talents which fitted him not only to conquer but to govern the world. He was capable of framing those bold and original schemes of policy, which gave a new form to human affairs. The revolution in commerce, brought about by the force of his genius, is hardly inferior to that revolution in empire, occasioned by the success of his arms.⁴⁶

Robertson's contemporary, the Edinburgh brewer and burgess Hugh Bell, was sharply critical of what he saw as the historian's deliberate anachronism and manipulation of events to make thematic points. Bell pointed out that Robertson was not only entirely contradicted in his interpretation by Livy, but that the political implications the historian attempted to tease out were disturbing in the extreme. 'The empires of Alexander, of Rome, of Mahomet, of Charlemagne, of Philip, of Lewes, and of George', Bell scolded, 'all prove how destructive or how vain are attempts to overgrown monarchies. Philosophical historians ought to paint Alexander as an object of detestation; and detestable no doubt he was, when we consider the desolation he brought.'⁴⁷ Bell was an authentic representative of a strand within Scottish civic humanist thought hostile to empire and all its works. Even Paterson understood Alexander as a bloody conqueror whose practice a Scottish empire would not seek to emulate. Robertson had no sympathy

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 20.

⁴⁷ H. Bell, *Observations Upon the Character of Alexander the Great, as Given by the Learned and Reverend Dr. Robertson, in his History of America and in His Historical Disquisition*, (Edinburgh, 1792), p. 5.

with this austere tradition. His Alexander was to be celebrated as the guiding force of the commerce of the Hellenistic world, the commercial Lycurgus upon whose works the Romans built. Modern commentators have been less concerned with Robertson's questionable politics than his questionable philosophical history. Not only should Alexander have stood in ironic relation to the international order he brought about, but he also certainly should not have been portrayed as possessing a true understanding of commerce, which for the Scottish literati was a fundamental difference between the mindset of the ancients and the moderns.⁴⁸ David Womersley has suggested that Alexander was an example of the type of transitional character Robertson deployed to explain the progress of one stage of human development to another; Neil Hargraves has further suggested that in his combination of attributes he served as a literary foreshadowing of Columbus.⁴⁹ However, if one bears in mind that for Robertson, Alexander's achievements were most fully brought into fruition by the Romans, Alexander emerges as the Charles V of the ancient world – or rather, what Charles V could have been had lasting conquest proved possible in a Europe of increasingly balanced states.

The extent, however, of the Roman power, which reached over the greatest part of the known world, the vigilant inspection of the Roman magistrates, and the spirit of the Roman government, no less intelligent than active, gave such additional security to commerce, as animated it with new vigour. The union among nations was never so entire, nor the intercourse so perfect, as within the bounds of this vast empire. Commerce, under the Roman dominion, was not obstructed by the jealousy of rival states, interrupted by frequent hostilities, or limited by partial restrictions. One superintending power moved and regulated the history of mankind, and enjoyed the fruits of their joint efforts.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cf. D. Hume 'Of Commerce' *Political Essays* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁴⁹ D. Womersley, 'Introduction' in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Womersley (Harmondsworth, 1994) I, pp. lii-lv; N. Hargraves 'Enterprise, adventure and industry: the formation of 'commercial character' in William Robertson's *History of America*', *History of European Ideas*, 29 (2003), p. 40.

⁵⁰ *America*, vol. I, p. 26.

Rome thus emerges in a less paradoxical and more positive light than it had in *Charles V*, but Rome had here a different role to play. In *Charles V*, Robertson had described a corrupted Rome ripe for conquest; here he described a Roman functioning commercial empire as the summation of his historical 'Old Testament.' If before he had hinted at how the ancient world stood in need of revelation, now he described how it was prepared and ready to receive it. Robertson did not make the point expressly, but his theologically-minded readers, or readers familiar with his earlier sermon, would have been well aware that the implication was that the birth of Christ coincided with the perfection of commercial empire. Extending a theme from that sermon, Robertson implied that it was commercially driven empire that prepared the world to hear Christ's message. It was less important that a commercial spirit inform Roman government itself – that claim would not have been tenable – but that the stability provided by Roman universal monarchy allowed international commerce to flourish in safety without the fear of being distorted by jealousy of trade. In this sense the international state system of modern Europe had yet to match entirely the achievements of the ancients. Yet for all its achievements in government and commerce, the geographical knowledge of the ancients remained strikingly limited. 'It seems neither adequate to what we might have expected from the activity of the human mind, nor to what might have been performed by the power of the great empires which successively governed the world,' Robertson lamented. The age of Christ's first appearance in the world was thus one in which only a limited portion of the world would be in a position to receive Him.

With the progress of civilisation following the fall of Rome, this was at last in a position to be corrected. Robertson briefly revisited the ground covered in the *View*,

beginning with the key event of the growth of the free cities of Italy, and a revival of international commerce. The zeal of the Crusaders had brought the rude leaders of the West into contact with the more refined manners of the East, providing them with a first taste of luxury and a new motive to pursue distant commerce. The culmination of this development was technology. 'The compass may be said to have opened to man the dominion of the sea, and to have put him in full possession of the earth, by enabling him to visit every part of it.'⁵¹

Robertson believed that the question as to why it was the Portuguese, and not one of the more eminent nations of Europe, that had made the first dramatic inroads towards navigation and discovery, required some explanation. While it certainly could not be said that the Portuguese constitution encouraged improvement, her system of government became increasingly regular, and for this, the experience of war proved decisive. Like Spain, Portugal had been under the yoke of the Moors for much of the Middle Ages and the effects of recovering their liberty had a similar effect as had the recovery of liberty by the Italian cities. The concerted national effort required to expel the Moors and to successfully wage a civil war over a disputed succession increased the power of the Portuguese crown at the expense of its nobility, giving the crown undisputed command over its armies. National vigour had been raised to a fever pitch, and the collective energies of the people seemed to burst out of their narrow territory onto the high seas.⁵² The expeditions and discoveries of Henry the Navigator and particularly that of Bartholomew Diaz were only the most striking manifestation of this energy.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 51-52.

⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp 56-57.

The Portuguese were not only precocious in encouraging national efforts towards exploration and discovery, but also in making what would be the decisive mistake of all European governments in formulating their colonial policy; outsourcing overseas affairs to a corporate monopoly. The spectacular energies a national project had unleashed could not survive the restrictions of a bad privatisation. Colonisation 'ceased to be a national object, and became the concern of a private man, more attentive to his own gain, than to the glory of his country.'⁵³ As a result, Portugal relinquished its position as the vanguard of European discovery.

The decline of the Portuguese position was an opportunity readily seized by the other states of Europe. In conformity with his general understanding of the dynamics of international relations, Robertson portrayed Portuguese success as a provocation that stimulated the jealousy of others. Portuguese discovery had occurred at that moment of transition in the history of Europe when the governments of the great states were becoming sufficiently regular to allow monarchs a freer hand in formulating their policies. This development was beginning to draw the nations of Europe into a heightened state of awareness concerning their mutual operations. Thus, 'the fame of the vast discoveries which the Portuguese had already made, the reports concerning the extraordinary intelligence which they had received from the East, and the prospect of the voyage which they now mediated, drew the attention of all the European nations, and held them in suspense and expectation. Others formed conjectures concerning the revolutions which the success of the Portuguese schemes might occasion in the course of trade, and the political state of Europe.'⁵⁴ News of new discoveries reached the councils

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 73.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

of Europe at that moment when they first became prepared to receive them. The ground was prepared for exploration to become a reason of state. The rulers of Europe were not yet able to seize immediately upon the importance of Portuguese discoveries. Jealousy and the drive to emulation were only beginning to materialise into coherent thinking about national policy. Spain was to emerge as the second nation to undertake successful exploration, but only due to the patience and constancy of an Italian, Christopher Columbus. Columbus was one of the few to have fully understood the implications of Portuguese endeavours, and to have been spurred on by them to even greater action.⁵⁵ Columbus fulfils in the narrative of *The History of America* a function parallel to that of Maurice of Saxony in *Charles V*, a man of unusual capacity who recognised that a major paradigm shift had occurred in human affairs, and successfully internalised that shift and put it into effective action. As such Robertson devoted an unusual amount of attention to his personal psychology.

If the characters of *Charles V* were largely static vessels for particular passions in operation upon the political stage, the personalities portrayed in *America* emerge far more rounded, almost novelistic. Introducing Christopher Columbus, Robertson deftly tied together biography with psychology. While Charles' ambition seemed to be *sui generis*, Columbus, as would be the case with Cortés and Pizarro, was transparently the product of his education, fittingly so, for *America* was the first work of history Robertson entirely composed as the Principal of a great university. As Anthony Pagden has noted,

⁵⁵'The successful progress of the Portuguese navigators had wakened a spirit of curiosity and emulation, which set every man of science upon examining all the circumstances that led to the discoveries which they had made, or that afforded a prospect of succeeding in any new and bolder undertaking. The mind of Columbus, naturally inquisitive, capable of deep reflection, and turned to speculations of this kind, was so often employed in revolving the principles upon which the Portuguese had founded their schemes of discovery, and the mode in which they had carried them on, that he gradually began to form an idea of improving upon their plan, and of accomplishing discoveries which hitherto they had attempted in vain.' *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 89.

Robertson created a Columbus who personified the achievements of the progress of European culture.⁵⁶ It needs to be stressed, however, that for Robertson as a historian, the progress of civilization achieved its apogee in the progress of the art of governance. Robertson's Columbus combined the virtues of the scholar, the soldier, and perhaps most crucially, the statesman in equal measure. The combination of theoretical and practical knowledge led Columbus to his conclusion that one could reach the east by sailing due west. His studies and experiences had further rendered Columbus adept at 'the arts of governing the minds of men.'⁵⁷

Columbus' skill at rhetoric and address eventually won the backing of Queen Isabella of Castile, who bestowed on Columbus the status of viceroy over any territory he would discover for the Spanish crown. Columbus, however, proved himself a masterly statesman long before the *Santa Maria* ever reached land. Robertson rehearsed the metaphor of the statesman as captain (or rather admiral) of the ship of state and exploited it at length. He presented Columbus' crew as a political society in microcosm, led by a man who 'possessed a thorough knowledge of mankind', an attribute which 'formed him for command.' Columbus knew well enough that fear and ignorance combined in the hearts of his crew to threaten both his position and any hope of completing the voyage. Fear travelled 'like a contagion' and at the tipping point wreaked all sense of subordination. Columbus required all the intrigue and dissimulation of the new diplomacy to prove successful. He fiddled with the navigation logs to assuage their anxieties, appealed to their ambition and avarice, and failing that, resorted to all manner

⁵⁶ A. Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: from Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993), p. 100.

⁵⁷ *America*, vol. I, p. 120.

of threats to keep the crew on board. More impressively still, Columbus recognised the limits of his own power, and agreed to turn back if land was not reached.⁵⁸

Robertson's idealisation of Columbus served several purposes. He could be shown as a nearly exemplary character that had played a key role in showing how the achievements of the Portuguese could be emulated in practical terms. Perhaps more importantly, however, he was able to show that Columbus' character had been essential to the success of the voyage. Thus the Spanish discovery of the Americas emerges as one aspect of the culmination of the progress of society in uncorrupted form. However, as Robertson told it, the subsequent history of the Spanish empire was to be a story of the corruption of those early heroic efforts. At the close of the work Robertson was to sum up his assessment of the state of the Spanish colonies that Columbus had founded:

A spirit of corruption has infected all the colonies of Spain in America. Men far removed from the seat of government; impatient to acquire wealth, that they may return speedily home from what they are apt to consider as a state of exile in a remote unhealthful country; allured by opportunities too tempting to be resisted, and seduced by the example of those around them; find their sentiments of honour and of duty gradually relax. In private life, they give themselves up to a dissolute luxury, while in their public conduct they become unmindful of what they owe to their sovereign and to their country.⁵⁹

This was a straightforwardly republican account of how corruption led to decline, although as we shall see, Robertson was not so convinced that the corruption was of such deep root as to render renewal impossible. Yet the above passage displays much of what Robertson saw as unfortunate in how Spain had squandered its opportunity to expand civilisation outward to new peoples. In policy terms, the Spanish government had paid insufficient heed to the need for strong government in its colonies. Executive power had proven too lax to constrain citizens placed in conditions of unprecedented temptation.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 125-128.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 352.

That temptation was the quick riches on offer in the mines: gold. The very initial success of the Spanish settlements were only to further intoxicate the adventurers, and in their minds to subordinate all other considerations to lust for acquisition. Not only had Spanish policy failed to prepare for this, it had unwittingly encouraged it both in the types of people brought over and above all in the flawed understanding of commerce as the acquisition of species that made it possible.

Most fundamentally, however, the Spanish colonies in the Americas had manifested their corruption in their commerce with its indigenous people. If *The History of America* aimed to provide a narrative framework within which statesmen could extract lessons on how to approach the problems of imperial governance, few such problems of governance were as analytically and morally problematic as the question of how the indigenous peoples were to be conceptualised and dealt with. As Chapters three and five have demonstrated, the promise of the conversion of the native peoples of the Americas was fundamental to Robertson's conception of the providential role of European empire. As Robertsonian scholarship has often noted, the native peoples of the New World occupied two distinct roles within the narratives of *The History of America*, receiving a relatively sympathetic portrayal within the narrative sections and a far more severe treatment within the scientific dissertations of Books IV and VII.⁶⁰ It would remain an open question whether neo-classical conventions allowed for any legitimate agency on their part if agency were construed as an active role in war and diplomacy as traditionally understood. Robertson first attempted to accommodate these newcomers to history with

⁶⁰ S. J. Brown, 'An Eighteenth Century Historian and the Amerindians: Culture, Colonialism and Christianity in William Robertson's *The History of America*', in *Studies in World Christianity*, 2 (1996), 204-222; A. Du Toit, 'Who are the Barbarians? Scottish Views of Conquest and Indians, and Robertson's *History of America*, *Scottish Literary Journal*, 26 (1999). p. 34.

a shift of tonal register. It has been remarked that *The History of America* is a stylistic departure from the markedly drier and even austere style of much of *Charles V*, and is seemingly precocious in its romanticism.⁶¹ This was not without purpose. For, in Robertson's account, the point of contact between the Spaniards and the natives emerged as a key event in sacred as well as in historical time.⁶²

Robertson's language in narrating these first contacts became correspondingly more overtly novelistic, invoking the glamour of an exotic and enticing world in the sense of wonder it evoked.

The Europeans were hardly less amazed at the scene now before them. Every herb, and shrub, and tree, was different from those which flourished in Europe. The soil seemed to be rich, but bore few marks of cultivation. The climate, even to Spaniards, felt warm, though extremely delightful. The inhabitants appeared in the simple innocence of nature, entirely naked. Their black hair, long and uncurled, floated upon their shoulders, or was bound in tresses around their heads. They had no beards, and every part of their bodies was perfectly smooth. Their complexion was of a dusky copper colour, their features singular, rather than disagreeable, their aspect gentle and timid. Though not tall, they were well shaped, and active. Their faces, and several parts of their body, were fantastically painted with glaring colours. They were shy at first through fear, but soon became familiar with the Spaniards, and with transports of joy received from them hawks-bells, glass beads, or other baubles, in return for which they gave such provisions as they had, and some cotton yarn, the only commodity of value they could produce. Towards evening, Columbus returned to his ships, accompanied by many of the islanders in their boats, which they called *canoes*, and though rudely formed out of the trunk of a single tree, they rowed them with surprising dexterity. Thus, in the first interview between the inhabitants of the old and new worlds, every thing was conducted amicably, and to their mutual satisfaction. The former, enlightened and ambitious, formed already vast ideas with respect to the advantages which they might derive from the regions that began to open to their view. The latter, simple and undiscerning, had no foresight of the calamities and desolation which were approaching their country.⁶³

⁶¹ D. Womersley, 'The Historical Writings of William Robertson' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47, (1986), 506. This aspect of Robertson was keenly appreciated by Robertson's early nineteenth century readers, from Walter Scott to Keats. On this transmission see O. D. Edwards, 'Robertsonian Romanticism and realism' in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, p. 112.

⁶² For a discussion of how events created their own subjective time frames, and the relation between sacred and secular time in Western historiography more generally, see D. J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Time Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago, 1987).

⁶³ *America*, vol. I, pp. 134-5.

Both the Spaniards and the Indians naturally interpreted each other's actions according to their own mental categories. Yet if Spanish and native were doomed to mutual incomprehension, that was not to imply that they could not at a simpler level recognise and respond to each other's humanity. The response of the natives to the sinking of one of Columbus' ships was telling. They entered into a complete sympathy with the Spaniard's loss, and acted quite selflessly in lending aid. Not only had the outward behaviour of the Indians conformed to a perfect Christian charity, they revealed themselves as sociable men of feeling.⁶⁴

Columbus understandably felt sanguine about the prospect of securing the compliance of the natives in establishing a Spanish settlement. It was of great importance that Columbus' first settlement rested upon the explicitly negotiated consent of Guacanahari. The agreement was feudal in nature, land in return for military protection. That military protection worked both ways, however. The agreement was sealed with an unsubtle display of the superior military technology at Spanish disposal, leaving the natives fearful and trembling. Robertson spelled out the darker side already implicit in the relationship, noting that in the physical preparation of the settlement, the Indians had erected 'the first monument of their own servitude'.

⁶⁴ As soon as the islanders heard of this disaster, they crowed to the shore, with their prince Guacanahari at their head. Instead of taking advantage of the distress in which they beheld the Spaniards, to attempt anything to their detriment, they lamented their misfortune with tears of sincere condolence. Not satisfied with this unavailing expression of their sympathy, they put to sea a number of canoes, and under the direction of the Spaniards, assisted in saving whatever could be got out of the wreck; and by the united labour of so many hands, almost every thing of value was carried ashore. As fast as the goods were landed, Guacanahari in person took charge of them. By his orders they were all deposited in one place, and armed sentinels were posted, who kept the multitude at a distance, in order to prevent them not only from embezzling, but from inspecting too curiously what belonged to their guests. Next morning this prince visited Columbus, who was now on board the *Nigna*, and endeavoured to console him for his loss, by offering all that he possessed to repair it.' *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 143.

The unequal if pacific relations between Spanish and native did not survive Columbus' absence on his return to Spain shortly thereafter. Upon his return from Spain he had discovered the garrison at Hispaniola deserted; nothing but signs of struggle remained. Tellingly, though, the story of the conflict came entirely from the brother of the cazique, whose authority Robertson seemed to accept. The behaviour of the Spanish left in isolation from their commander strikingly displayed through negative example how government and the rule of law serve to regulate unsociable passions. The unrestrained Spanish had dispersed into small units of bandits, marauding and pillaging without fear of reprisal. The Indians had come to recognise their visitors as all too human, had overcome their earlier reverence and had summarily burned the Spanish village to the ground. None survived. The Spanish had been immediately seized with the urge to revenge, the principal passion Robertson was to associate with the savage warrior ethic. Columbus had proved the very model of stoical self-command, suppressing his own resentment and persuading his men not to act upon theirs. There was to be no revenge, rather rebuilding.

The episode was illustrative for Robertson of the challenges of civil governance in a new colony. Spanish America had lacked effective institutions; power had been entirely personal. This would have proven less of a problem had the early Spanish visitors been peaceably predisposed. Unfortunately, peaceful contentment had been quite antithetical to the spirit of a loose assortment of gentlemen adventurers whose heads had spun with superstitious visions of gold. The patient industry necessary for prospecting, let alone for agriculture, had not counted among their virtues. Added to this the hot climate had sapped much of what little industry they possessed. They had been, as

Robertson described them, lazy, impatient, and mutinous.⁶⁵ No power structure that required the genius of a Columbus to function steadily could long be expected to endure.

Economic necessity had soon driven the Indians to war. Rudimentary levels of Indian production had been inadequate for more developed Spanish appetites, and self-interest had required the natives to drive out the Spanish. However, the Indians had become undone as much by their lack of refinement in the art of war as they had been by lack of technology. They had taken to the open field in full daylight. Columbus, against his own more prudent judgment, had been compelled to exact tribute from the Indians in the form of gold and cotton. Robertson felt such an imposition had been the height of folly, and had showed no understanding of the nature of the 'barbarians' they had forced into such an unequal commerce. Regular taxation required regular industry on the part of the taxed to support it, and such regular industry was altogether alien to the spirit of barbarism. The first consequence of the foolishness of Spanish policy had been more violence and unrest. However, the stratagem of the Indians to abandon their rudimentary agriculture and flee to higher ground proved catastrophic to their own population.

Columbus himself, as it transpired, had not been entirely blameless in setting policy. Robertson was sharply critical of Columbus' proposal to populate the new colony with convicts. Fully aware that present British policy approved similar measures regarding the deportation of Britain's own convicts, Robertson spelled out his disapproval at length. If the opportunities for easy gain available in the Americas were a temptation for the best of men to throw off the shackles of all reason and morality in its pursuit, flooding a new colony with those who could not avoid such temptations under the more rigorous rule of Spanish domestic law seemed wilfully negligent. Yet in the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 169.

short term, Columbus' iron fist in enforcing discipline prevented the worst abuses. This would not prove the case under Columbus' successor as governor, Nicolas Ovando, who abandoned the 'severe discipline' prudently imposed by Columbus, as well as his arrangements for the rights and persons of the Indians. For Robertson this was to result in a development of crucial importance in colonial jurisprudence, and one that would condition the manner in which the Spanish waged war against a people they did not understand.

Upon assuming the post of governor of Hispaniola, he had granted the Indians the status of free citizens whose labour could not legally be compelled, a policy in keeping with the wishes of the Crown. The free status of the Indians, however, had threatened the economic viability of the settlement at Hispaniola. As Robertson wrote of it, Ovando had attempted to improve the efficiency of the plantation by prudently reducing the royal slice of mining proceeds, and making a more equal distribution of Indian labourers among the settlers. The new governor had been keen to maintain a façade of propriety however, and had directed 'their masters' to provide a minimal compensation to their Indian labourers.⁶⁶ Ovando's policies, however, directly led to outright war with the Indians, a conflict that confounded Robertson's powers of narration. Robertson retained a humanistic understanding that the proper subjects of historical narration were war and diplomacy. But this understanding made key assumptions concerning the relationship between war and the warrior. The issue prompted from Robertson the historiographical aside that

when war is carried on between nations whose state of improvement is in any degree similar, the means of defence bear some proportion to those employed in the attack; and in this equal contest such efforts must be made, such talents are displayed, and

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 252.

such passions roused, as exhibit mankind to view in a situation no less striking than interesting. It is one of the noblest functions of history, to observe and to delineate men at a juncture when their minds are most violently agitated, and all their powers and passions are called forth. Hence the operations of war, and the struggles between contending states, have been deemed by historians, ancient as well as modern, a capital and important article in the annals of human actions.⁶⁷

War thus particularly merited the attention of a philosophical historian, for it was in war that the active powers of man could be witnessed in full cry. War between Ovando's men and the Indians did not satisfy these narrative aspirations, as neither side supplied the sort of behaviour that could be celebrated in humanistic terms. In European terms, a prerequisite of glory in war was a genuine competition, a prerequisite of honour a shared sense of each side playing the same game and abiding by its rules. In this war, however, the Spanish and natives in contrast had viewed each other with mutual incomprehension. What remained for Robertson was a critique of the conduct of the Spanish in terms of the European *ius gentium*. The Spanish viewed the natives as subhuman, and thus felt no compulsion to obey the laws of war in treating with them.

They conceived the Americans to be animals of an inferior nature, who were not intitled to the rights and privileges of men. In peace, they subjected them to servitude. In war, they paid no regard to those laws, which, by a tacit connection between contending nations, regulate hostility, and set some bounds to its rage. They considered them not as men fighting in defence of their liberty, but as slaves, who had revolted against their masters. . . . This war was occasioned by the perfidy of the Spaniards, in violating a treaty which they had made with the natives..⁶⁸

Robertson was thus uncharacteristically legalistic in his critique of Spanish behaviour. In the text of *Charles V*, Robertson had often criticised Francis I's credulity in believing Charles would recognise any legal or honourable restraint to his pursuing his own interest. But then Charles, whatever his faults, had at least recognised the humanity of his adversaries, and when Robertson criticised the behaviour of Charles it was in terms he would himself have understood. Like Charles, Ovando had utterly violated the law of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 253.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 254.

hospitality. The female cazique, Anacoana, had received Ovando and his men in a spirit of friendship. This act of generosity was met with sabotage and slaughter. The Spanish, in their barbarous conduct of war, had utterly cast aside whatever civility they had been educated to possess. At one level Robertson could be seen as invoking the standard Tacitean or Montaignian inversion of the civilised and the barbarian employed by Raynal, while emphasising that when civilised man left the environment that made his civility possible, he emerged far more savage than his savage enemy. Robertson pushed this argument further, however, by pointing out that it was a failure in the understanding of the Spanish concerning the nature of the natives that lay at the root of their slip into barbarism. Robertson had not yet solved the problem concerning the possibility of introducing intelligibility into a narrative of tragic mutual incomprehension. The only vocabulary humanist historiography had to offer was one of corruption. War was a dignified subject for the humanist historian, cold-blooded massacre was not.

Cold-blooded massacre was also the effect of considered policy, as defeated Indians were sent to the mines. The very horror of what the Spanish had unleashed had informed their reclassification of the Indian as an inferior creature. For Robertson the paradox was that the very cruelty of Ovando's methods had rendered the colony initially prosperous. He had governed the Spanish as well as he had treated the Indians unconscionably. He had established what in the short term proved a secure rule of law and introduced a more varied commerce. Under his tutelage a plantation system had begun to prosper and would eventually arouse the attention of the crown. The political education of Ovando and Ferdinand had developed in parallel. Increased revenues won Ferdinand over to the value of overseas possessions, inspiring him to develop what

Robertson described as 'that profound, but jealous, policy by which she governs her dominions in the new world.' He gave careful attention to the composition of such institutions as the Board of Trade and the structure of ecclesiastical government, carefully ensuring its independence from Rome. A spirit of jealousy similarly informed Ferdinand's commercial policy, heavily restricting both imports and personages, securing Hispaniola as a captive market for the Spanish crown. Yet at the moment when the plantation system of Hispaniola began to show profits, it also began to sow the seeds of its own collapse through the astonishingly high mortality rate of its slave labour. Robertson did not query the figure that as many as forty thousand may have died within the first generation of the system. He did not attempt to arouse the sympathy of his readers with the plight of the Indians in the manner Raynal had done.⁶⁹ Polite history had reached the limits of what it could narrate with dignity.

Spanish imperialism had thus produced a diabolical dialectic of conquest and exploitation. Robertson described the drive for new conquests as fuelled by a need to create a new labour force to replace that which had been eliminated in the genocide. Here the key player was the new governor and Columbus' kinsman Don Diego. After the extent of the initial genocide was realised, Don Diego spearheaded the importation of forty thousand native bodies to Hispaniola.⁷⁰ Robertson's narrative at this point seemed to have lost its bearings under the weight of the contradictory themes he attempted to

⁶⁹ 'They were indiscriminately chained together like beasts. Those who sank under their burdens, were compelled to rise by severe blows. No intercourse passed between the sexes but by stealth. The men perished in the mines, and the women in the fields, which they cultivated with their weak hands. Their constitutions already exhausted, with excessive labour, were still further impaired by an unwholesome and scanty diet. The mothers expired with hunger and fatigue, pressing their dead or dying infants to their breasts, shrivelled and contracted for want of a proper supply of milk. The fathers either poisoned themselves; or sought death on those very trees on which they had just before seen their wives or their children expire.' Raynal, *Two Indies*, vol. II, pp. 158-159.

⁷⁰ *America*, vol. I, p. 263.

pursue. On one side, Robertson portrayed Don Diego as suffering similar trials to Columbus, his own native prudence being insufficiently recognised or allowed to flourish by inconsiderate metropolitan authority. Don Diego's notions of prudent policy, however, included comprehending genocide in terms of an unfortunate labour shortage resolvable through the importation of more bodies to be used up and discarded. Robertson seemed to wish the reader to sympathise, nonetheless, with his plight at being undercut at every turn by Ferdinand. This reached its absurd conclusion when the reader was asked to sympathise with Don Diego's frustration at having his power, 'the most valuable prerogative which the governor possessed,' of distributing Indians amongst retainers curtailed. This might have been presented ironically as the conversion of an obtuse monarch who had presented a thousand obstacles to Columbus now insisting on a change of policy to ensure the lasting viability of those settlements, but this was an irony Robertson did not pursue. The wars of Ovando and the policies of Don Diego represented a crisis both in Spanish history and in Robertson's narrative. At this point Robertson's task of presenting the founding fathers of Spanish imperialism as exemplars of statesmanship broke down. This was an incomprehension that Robertson had to explain before he addressed the more extended commerce between peoples of Books V and VI. Robertson was soon to move away from narration altogether to attempt to provide an explanation of the principles of savage society that informed their conduct of war.

All that remained for Robertson in concluding Book III was a brief attempt to distance the clergy from these events. Perhaps to rebuff Raynal's continuous assertion that a fundamental intolerance within Christianity led to the inhumane treatment of the

Indians by the Spanish, it was of great importance for Robertson to be able to show that ecclesiastics had begun the outcry against these brutalities. Sectarian rivalry among the different monastic orders, however, had the unfortunate effect of ensuring that religious authority backed both sides of the Indian question, Franciscans tending towards criticism of the plantation system, the Dominicans towards support of government. Called in to arbitrate, Ferdinand found in favour of the Dominicans, adding that slavery was necessary to thwart idolatry, and that the Franciscans should now prudently keep their own counsel. The Dominicans for their own part now saw that it was pointless to preach the gospel to a people whose spirits were broken.

Continuing his theme of clerical misgiving at the Spanish treatment of the natives, Robertson threw the problem into sharp relief by ending his Book III with a brief narrative of the tribulations of the fierce critic of the plantation system and defender of Indian rights, the bishop of Chiapas, Bartólome de las Casas. In order to fit Las Casas into his book on the initial problems of imperial governance faced by the Spanish in the New World, Robertson had to radically rearrange chronology. It would have been more conventional to introduce Las Casas, as Raynal had done, in the aftermath of the conquest of Mexico. He could then have appeared, as Raynal had described him, as a uniquely virtuous opponent of unmitigated Spanish perfidy.⁷¹ Robertson's own treatment of Las Casas was more ambivalent than has sometimes been described, an ambivalence that

⁷¹ 'As he was more a *man* than a *priest*, he felt more for the cruelties exercised against them, than for their superstitions.... This courageous, firm, disinterested man cited his country to the tribunal of the whole universe. In his treatise of the tyranny of the Spaniards in America, he accuses them of having destroyed fifteen millions of Indians. They ventured to find fault with the acrimony of his style, but no one convicted him of exaggeration. His writings, which indicate the amiable turn of his disposition, and the sublimity of his sentiments, have branded his barbarous countrymen with a disgrace, which time hath not, and never will efface.' Raynal, *Two Indies*, vol. II. p. 191.

underscored the difficulties in narrating this chapter of the Spanish experience.⁷² First, Robertson admired Las Casas as an adroit advocate for his cause. He was successful in having his case heard at the highest levels and effectively answered; on his word Cardinal Ximenes effectively overturned the entire system of government in the New World. Yet Robertson admired rather more the clarity of insight of the brothers of St Jerome sent by Ximenes to conduct a thorough audit of imperial governance, principally their argument that the Spanish colonial system in the New World was based upon slave labour, and to abandon it would effectively mean to abandon America. Their perspective had the added virtue of an accurate assessment of the capacities of the Indians; they would never labour if not compelled. The brothers had recommended a prudent moderation of such forced labour. Las Casas had dissented, arguing that such measures subordinated natural justice to prudence to an unacceptable degree.

Robertson began his discussion of Las Casas' policy with a forthright condemnation of slavery in all its forms. He explicitly compared Las Casas' project to create an economically viable yet not exploitative colonial system with that of the Jesuits. 'He supposed that the Europeans, by availing themselves of that ascendant which they possessed in consequence of their superior progress in science and improvement,' Robertson wrote, 'might gradually form the minds of the Americans to relish those comforts of which they were destitute, might train them to the arts of civil life, and render them capable of its functions.'⁷³ As discussed in previous chapters, Robertson found such a project highly attractive. He had given a qualified endorsement of this project in

⁷² B. P. Lenman, 'From Savage to Scot', in *Expansion of Empire*, p. 203; Brown, 'An Eighteenth Century Historian' p. 210. From different perspectives, both see Robertson's attitude as fundamentally condescending, if not hostile.

⁷³ *America*, I, p. 325.

his only published sermon, and painted it in glowingly Utopian terms in the text of his *Charles V*. The project was not, however, a success. Las Casas' intended site, the province of Cumana, now found itself victim to Spanish revenge attacks following the slaying of two Dominican missionaries by the natives. He had no choice but to attempt to salvage what he could of the unfortunate situation, but the natives of Cumana, already provoked beyond endurance, attacked the settlement at first opportunity. Forced to abandon his project, Las Casas entered a monastery with his reputation in tatters. For even the most sympathetic of observers, the gulf between Spanish and native understandings was insurmountable.

Robertson closed his third book with the multiple tragedies of the career of Las Casas. It would be difficult to close *The History of America* at the end of this book confident that one had gained an understanding of the guiding hand of providence in human affairs. What Robertson had supplied was a catalogue of human folly and misunderstandings with the most appalling of consequences. Neil Hargraves has remarked that Book III constituted 'something of a nadir in the narrative.'⁷⁴ The reasons for this were something more fundamental than imprudence. Spanish policy had clearly suffered from a number of misapprehensions, concerning the nature of true wealth and the need for a firm rule of law in conformity with metropolitan standards, but these failures of policy were the natural foibles of a Spanish state in a period of transition facing altogether new problems of governance. More troubling altogether for a narrative of the providential joining together of the human species was that the Spanish in America had been so corrupted by a superstitious reverence for gold that they became unable to recognise the humanity of the Indians. With the genocide of the natives of Hispaniola the

⁷⁴ N. Hargraves, 'Enterprise, adventure and industry', p. 46.

sentimental network between author, character and reader had ceased to operate.

Narrative history even at its most sentimental had no effective method of explaining this rupture in human sociability. Nor did humanist historiography possess the resources to explain how Indian society was so tragically incapable of putting up any kind of serious resistance to its own annihilation. Robertson seems to have understood as much, and at this point he broke off his narrative altogether to commence a lengthy digression on Indian manners in the language of the Scottish science of society.

To suggest that Robertson embraced Scottish social science to resolve problems that arose within his narrative is to reverse one of the most often repeated claims in Robertsonian scholarship, namely that Robertson chafed at the formal constraints of Scottish science, and employed the greater freedom of narrative to escape from them.⁷⁵ Such a view takes as granted not only that Scottish social science was at that point understood as a single formal entity, but also that Robertson understood his writings as a response to it. It is ironic that those who most insist that Robertson was fundamentally a narrative historian tend in practice to assume the conceptual primacy of philosophy over narrative. The argument that Robertson primarily sought in his writings to qualify the claims made by conjectural history has been buttressed by the assertion that it was by nature sceptical and materialist. There is certainly something in this, but it is worth bearing in mind that Robertson was as committed an opponent to immoderate religious zeal as was Hume, and that a materialism guided by the hand of providence was not altogether alien to Presbyterian thinking. The extent to which the Presbyterian minister

⁷⁵ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Providence and Progress: an introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson, in *WREE*; p. 56 Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon*, (Cambridge, 1997) p. ; A. Du Toit, 'Who are the barbarians', p. 42; Hargraves, 'Enterprise, adventure, and industry,' p. 35.

chose to accept and embrace what was most cutting edge in Scottish social theory is as illuminating as what he chose to reject.

Part III: American savages and European barbarians

Robertson's discussion of the savage state in Book IV has attracted more attention and controversy than anything else the historian put to paper. As stated previously, much of this resulted from historians of social theory finding within Robertson's exploration of savagery a pioneering example of analysis worthy of study in its own right. While the trend in recent Robertsonian historiography has been to view the historian's works more holistically, the precise relationship between Books III and IV remains something of a puzzle. As seen in the previous chapter, Robertson was a narrative historian who only departed from narrative to address a specific point. Robertson's isolation of the 'savage' resolved a series of crucial questions unresolved and perhaps irresolvable within the confines of humanist narrative. As we have seen, Robertson was unable adequately to account for the incapacity of the Spanish and the natives to establish a reciprocal network of sympathy and sociability. More fundamentally, he was unable to account for the utter inability of Indians to engage effectively in war against the Spanish or to survive the trauma of forced labour. The discussion here will present Book IV as a study that brought all aspects of the savage mind to bear on the conduct of war.⁷⁶

When Robertson sought refuge in science to resolve what sympathetic narrative could not, the historian only reflected the unease and uncertainty on the topic that characterised his generation. The nature of the savage mind had achieved a strategic urgency during the Seven Years War that it had not previously possessed. The conflict

⁷⁶ This discussion owes a great debt to that of Neil Hargraves. What Hargraves does not sufficiently account for, in the present author's view, is the extent to which Robertson's inability to bring the Indians into his narrative, and his consequent retreat into philosophy to address this lacuna, hinged on the issue of war. See Hargraves, 'The Language of Character and the Nature of Events', chapter 5.

originating out in the disputed territories of the Ohio Valley became entangled with the territorial claims and ambitions of three empires, the British, the French, and the Iroquois. The diplomacy of the Seven Years War was as influenced by negotiations between Quakers and the Delaware as it had been by those between the English and the Prussians. The superiority of French 'Indian policy' had long been a major strategic success, and was feared by British observers to prove potentially decisive in the conflict, as British military intelligence was at what seemed a nearly insuperable strategic disadvantage *vis à vis* the French on the field. British forces were at a loss how to predict and control Indian movements, as *The Scots Magazine* in April of 1763 reported with news of the infamous raid against the forces of General Amherst:

A private letter from Philadelphia, dated July 1 informs us that Gen. Johnston, among many others, had left his habitation, and come to Albany. He reported the insurrection to be so general, that even the Mohaks, among whom he lived, till then our best friends, had joined the rest of the pillage and destroyed the country. The letter adds, that Gen. Amherst was set out from New York for Albany; and that every officer and soldier able to walk had been ordered forthwith to the rendezvous at this latter place in order to march against the Indians in those parts. The Indians are said to have been so long, and so carefully employed in providing for this scheme, that they have now by them great quantities of provision, and as much ammunition as, it is thought, will serve them for five years.

It seems their intention was, to have made a general attack upon the back settlers in the time of harvest, to have destroyed all that came in their way, and to have cut off the subsistence of those who might escape; but the precipitancy of their young warriors has, in a great measure, frustrated this horrid design. As it is, many whole families have been barbarously murdered, and the crops, habitations, stock, and provisions, of them and many more destroyed or carried off. A good many hundreds of families have fled from the back settlements to different places down the country, without either subsistence or money. The number of British traders murdered is great, and the value of the effects they have been plundered of is reckoned at 500,000l sterling.⁷⁷

Such incidents had the effect of portraying the Indians as unsettlingly inscrutable objects of fear and anxiety. Yet Linda Colley has recently written about how contemporary Scottish novels such as Tobias Smollett's *Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771) and Henry Mackenzie's *Man of the World* (1773) conveyed the highly ambivalent nature of eighteenth-century Scots to the 'Red Indian'. Reflecting popular attitudes,

⁷⁷ *The Scots Magazine* (April 1763), p. 463.

such novels represented the savage as at times an object of fear, at other times an object of beguiling fascination, but at all times something fundamentally mysterious and inexplicable. The captivity narratives of the Aberdonian Peter Williamson proved a highly popular source for eighteenth-century Scots concerning the nature of the Indians. As a child Williamson had been kidnapped and transported to Pennsylvania, where he was kidnapped a second time by the Delaware Indians, after which he took up British arms in the Seven Years War.⁷⁸ For Williamson the negative attributes of the French and the Indians, allied as they were against Britain, naturally blended together into a composite sketch of viciousness. 'Terrible and shocking to human nature were the barbarities daily committed by the savages, and are not to be paralleled in all the volumes of history! Scarce did a day pass but some unhappy family or other victims fell to French chicanery, and savage cruelty.'⁷⁹ Fear of the savage revealed itself most tellingly in repetition of horrific tales of torture of prisoners.

The third unhappy victim was reserved a few hours longer, to be, if possible, sacrificed in a more cruel manner; his arms were tied close to his body, and a hole being dug deep enough for him to stand upright, he was put therein, and earth ram'd and beat in all round his body up to his neck, so that this head only appeared above ground; they then scal'd him, and there let him remain for three or four hours in the greatest agonies; after which they made a small fire near his head, causing him to suffer the most excruciating torments imaginable, whilst the poor creature could only cry for mercy in killing him immediately, for his brains were boiling in his head: Inexorable to all his complaints they continued the fire, whilst shocking to behold! his eyes gushed out of their sockets; and such agonizing torments did the unhappy creature suffer for near two hours, 'till he was quite dead!⁸⁰

Williams made much rhetorical play concerning the inefficacy of language to transmit his feelings of horror. Williams condemned even more acidly, however, 'those who thro' perfidy, inattention, or pusillanimous and erroneous principles, suffered these savages at

⁷⁸ L. Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (London, 2002), pp. 188-192.

⁷⁹ P. Williamson, *French and Indian Cruelty* (Bristol, 1997).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

first, unrepelled, or even unmolested, to commit such outrages and incredible depredations and murders.' Yet, as Colley has shown, Williamson did go some way toward contextualising Indian cruelty by showing how it was partly the result of cynical French manipulation. More fundamentally, Williamson understood that making peace with the Indian was a crucial problem of imperial governance, without which, the British presence in North America was unlikely to prove successful. Robertson's views on Williamson's work have not been recorded, but he could scarcely have been unaware of it. *French and Indian Cruelty* became an international bestseller, going through a dozen editions in Edinburgh alone. As Colley has remarked, 'if there was a popular British classic about Native Americans in this period, this was certainly it.'⁸¹

Unfortunately for Robertson, the Scottish science of man to which he turned for resources was no less Janus-faced in his approach to the nature of the savage than the larger culture from which it emerged. Robertson's friend and professional colleague Adam Ferguson in *his Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) offered a far more challenging exploration of the nature of savagery. Ferguson's account of the history of rude nations was a corrective against the cultural arrogance of more civilised commentators, who could only see in earlier modes of society the lack of virtues since acquired.⁸² Ferguson was a critic of Adam Smith's historical jurisprudence that had rigidly indexed the history of civilisation to the evolution of the security of property. In Ferguson's view, the effect of such flawed analysis was radically to overstate the gulf

⁸¹ L. Colley, *Captives*, p. 190.

⁸² 'Our method, too frequently, is to rest the whole upon conjecture; to impute every advantage of our nature to those arts which we ourselves possess; and to imagine, that a mere negation of all our virtues is a sufficient description of man in his original state. We are ourselves the supposed standards of politeness and civilization; and where our own features do not appear, we apprehend, that there is nothing which deserves to be known.' A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 75.

between the manners of the savage and of the refined citizen. In an historical account such as Smith's, the triumph of commercial virtues necessary came at the expense of more heroic martial sentiments. Ferguson came to his understanding of savage society from a standpoint unique to the Scottish literati. Not only was he a Gaelic speaking highlander who was sensitive to the virtues of a precommercial society, but also he had indirect personal experience among the natives of the New World. While his text cites the traditional authorities of Tacitus, Charlevoix and Lafitau, the posthumous 1814 edition of the work adds the following appeal to the authority of contrary witnesses. 'This account of Rude Nations,' he wrote, 'in most points of importance, so far it relates to the original North Americans, is not founded so much on the testimony of this or the other writers cited, as it is on the concurring witnesses, who, in the course of trade, of war, and of treaties, have had ample occasion to observe the manners of that people.'⁸³ For all his attempts to muddy the distinctions the Scots had drawn between the principles on which savage and civilised societies rested, Ferguson did admit that there was a fundamental distinction between propertied barbarians and savages. Savages entirely lacked any sense of rank, station, or subordination. They relished equality, and would submit to no source of authority.⁸⁴ Drawing on Colden's *History of the Five Nations*, Ferguson wrote 'Power is no more than the natural ascendancy of the mind; the discharge of office no more than a natural exercise of the personal character; and while the community acts with an appearance of order, there is no sense of disparity in the breast of

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

any of its members.⁸⁵ Love of equality inculcated a sense of justice no less pure than that which existed in an advanced commercial state.

Yet paradoxically this did not mean that the North American Indians were entirely incapable of forming unions or acting in concert. Indeed, their diplomacy was no less intricate than that of Europe itself. Ferguson wrote,

they appeared to understand the objects of confederacy, as well as those of a separate nation; they studied a balance of power; the statesman of one country watched the designs and proceedings of another; and occasionally threw the weight of his tribe into a different scale. They had their alliances and treaties, which, like the nations of Europe, they maintained, or they broke, upon reasons of state; and remained at peace from a sense of necessity or expediency, and went to war upon any emergence of provocation or jealousy.⁸⁶

As discussed in the previous chapter, central to Robertson's narrative of the revival of civilisation in Europe was the argument that improvements in internal police led to the concerted national vigour requisite for any sustained foreign policy. The native Americans in Ferguson's account seemed to have effortlessly attained the result of centuries of European development. To an extent that Hume or Smith would have found difficult to account for in a people with no sense of propertied interest, they fully possessed that careful reason of state necessary to determine their 'national interest' in a broader sense.⁸⁷

According to Ferguson there was one crucial sense in which savage understanding of diplomacy differed from that of a European; the savage mind was geared to short term thinking about interest and advantage; savage peoples were unable to see beyond the next hunt or the next battle. Savage males had no interest in any sort of productive activity;

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁸⁷ 'They carry a penetrating eye for the thoughts and intensions of those with whom they have to deal; and when they mean to deceive, they cover themselves with arts which the most subtle can seldom elude. They harangue in their public councils with a nervous and figurative elocution; and conduct themselves in the management of their treaties with a perfect discernment of their national interests.' *Ibid.*, p. 89.

they saved their passion for conflict. Ferguson's Native Americans were perpetually engaged in war over points of honour that it was difficult for Europeans to comprehend. The savage did not face the enemy in open battle on equal terms, relying instead on stealth and ambush. Fortitude instead came into its own in the stoicism with which the savage endured the pains of torture in captivity. It was not uncommon for great displays of fortitude on the part of a prisoner of war to be rewarded with adoption. As fortitude was so honoured among savage society, it was the virtue inculcated into youth with the greatest attention.

The lesson Ferguson wished to drive home was that all that was best in human nature was there in the beginning. Man in earlier stages of society was not a child, was not necessarily corrupt, and did not consider himself lacking in any important respect. 'If mankind are qualified to improve their manners, the subject was furnished by nature; and the effect of cultivation is not to inspire the sentiments of tenderness and generosity, nor to bestow the principal constituents of a respectable character, but to obviate the casual abuses of passion; and to prevent a mind, which feels the best dispositions in their greatest force, from being at times likewise the sport of brutal appetite and ungovernable violence.'⁸⁸ In truth, savage man lacked only one decisive quality, the quality that would forever render him prey to the forces of a more advanced civilisation: discipline. Superior discipline did not imply any sort of moral superiority or right of dominion, however. Nor did it imply any duty of improvement on the part of the civilised. The hunter had no more wish to trade places with the merchant than vice-versa.

A point on which Ferguson was more circumspect was the extent to which the mind of the American Indian had been forged by climate. Ferguson followed orthodoxy

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

in holding that man flourished best within the temperate zone, while unduly warm weather brought sloth and inactivity. As such, under extremes of either heat or cold, Ferguson wrote, 'the active range of the human soul appears to be limited; and men are of inferior importance, whether as friends, or as enemies.'⁸⁹

The climates of America, though taken under the same parallel, are observed to differ from those of Europe. There, extensive marshes, great lakes, aged, decayed, and crowded forests, with the other circumstances that mark an uncultivated country, are supposed to replenish the air with heavy and noxious vapours, that give a double asperity to the winter, and during many months, by the frequency and continuance of fogs, snow, and frost, carry the inconveniences of the frigid zone far into the temperate.'⁹⁰

Ferguson seemed to follow those natural scientists that had understood the flora and fauna of the Americas to be fundamentally degenerate. While Ferguson believed there to be a materialist explanation for contrasting manners under different climates, he did not feel comfortable in spelling out what that connection could be. Nor did he feel comfortable in spelling out the consequences of this line of climatic conditioning for the indigenous inhabitants of the European empires. Yet one piece of data was striking, 'the Hollander is laborious and industrious in Europe; he becomes more languid and slothful in India.'⁹¹

Ferguson's study of the savage could only be of limited use to Robertson, a fact revealed through the historian's only limited reliance on it. Yet it was a highly suggestive account, persuasively revealing that savage warfare was the best index of savage manners. His discussion had the inestimable merit of understanding savage war from the inside, and of offering an explanation of its internal logic. Ferguson's analysis, however, in blurring so many of the distinctions between the psychologies of the savage

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

and the citizen, offered little help in explaining why the Spanish adventurers and their subsequent historians had found the gap between the two so difficult to bridge. A discussion that sought partially to redeem savage society was ill-disposed to account satisfactorily for its utter incapacity to hold its own. In moving away from property as the index of improvement, Ferguson had found little to replace it, or to successfully account for the historical evolution he understood in such ambivalent terms. Among the literati of eighteenth-century Scotland, Ferguson was always somewhat out on his own. He was a useful reminder, however of Robertson's own tenet of historical ethics, namely that actions should be judged within the ethical framework of the actor, and not that of the observer. His example was, at least, an incentive to moderation.

Robertson began his Book IV where Ferguson had left off, with a brief discussion of the relationship between man and his environment. Robertson's introduction to this topic elicited one of his most grandiose statements, and one that revealed he had entered into quite another mode of narration:

In order to complete the history of the human mind, and attain a perfect knowledge of its nature and operations, we must contemplate man in all those situations wherein he has been placed. We must follow him in his progress through the different stages of society, as he gradually advances from the infant state of civil life towards its maturity and decline. We must observe, at each period, how the faculties of his understanding unfold, we must attend to the efforts of his active powers, watch the various moments of desire and affection, as they rise in his breast, and mark whither they tend, and with what ardour they are excited.⁹²

To speak in terms of the history of the mind was to invoke the discourse of a natural history of man that took its bearings from Lockean epistemology.⁹³ Yet a key recourse for Scottish natural history was the categories and methods of natural jurisprudence; and

⁹² *America*, vol. II, p. 50.

⁹³ Locke's *Essay* claimed to offer a 'historical plain Method' for study of the 'Faculties of ...Man'. Op. cit. in P. B. Wood, 'The Natural History of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment' *History of Science*, 27 (1989) p. 96.

the passage has further been claimed to suggest the comparative approach of Montesquieu.⁹⁴ It further seconded Raynal's observation that America provided a rich supply of materials for the jurist and the natural historian.⁹⁵ The situation in which the Indian had been placed resembled the fabled state of nature. 'That state of primeval simplicity, which was known in our continent only by the fanciful description of poets,' he wrote, 'really existed in the other.'⁹⁶ For Robertson, the physical terrain of the New World astonished for two reasons, its sublime immensity and its bitter cold. Robertson's purpose here was not to instil a sense of wonder at God's undiscovered country, rather to survey the land with the cold eye of an improver. This strangely imposing, strangely cold terrain was admirably suited to improvement and commercial development, largely due to the number and extent of its waterways. Robertson likened the Gulf of Mexico to the Mediterranean and the Hudson to the Baltic, and noted American rivers had great potential utility for trade. Yet Robertson was not of the impression that these vast tracts were particularly pleasant. As noted in the discussion of the *View*, Robertson entertained no Tacitean romance of the forest and even less for what emerged from it. If America was unpleasant, however, it was more importantly abundant, a fact that yielded two conclusions. First, it revealed the possibilities and legitimacy for future improvement by

⁹⁴ N. Phillipson, 'Providence and Progress', p. 61.

⁹⁵ Raynal, however, felt such inquiries now to be impossible. 'The discovery of a new world would alone be sufficient to furnish employment for our curiosity. A vast continent entirely uncultivated, human nature reduced to the mere animal state, fields without harvests, treasures without proprietors, societies without policy, and men without manners, what an interesting and instructive spectacle would these have formed for a Locke, a Buffon, and a Montesquieu! What history could be so wonderful, so delightful, so affecting as the detail of their journey! But the stamp of rude unpolished nature is already disfigured. We shall endeavour to collect the features of it, though now half effaced, as soon as we have made the reader acquainted with those rapacious and cruel Christians, whom an unhappy chance first brought to this further hemisphere.' Raynal, *Two Indies*, vol. III, p.141.

⁹⁶ *America*, vol. II, p. 51.

Europeans, and second it hinted why the native Indians had not felt the need to do so.⁹⁷

A society blessed with abundance would have its subsistence needs readily satisfied, and would thus not be driven to improve either itself or its surroundings. Natural abundance above all required minimal mental effort to ensure survival. The thrust of Robertson's argument was that any insight into the savage mind lay in grasping the rudimentary nature of its needs, and the most primary of man's needs was for subsistence. Robertson elaborated in a celebrated passage that the manner in which a society procured its simplest needs contained the key to interpreting the structure of that society:

in every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly as that varies, their laws and policy must be different. The institutions suited to the ideas and exigencies of tribes, which subsist chiefly by fishing or hunting, and which have as yet acquired but an imperfect conception of any species of property, will be much more simple than those which must take place when the earth is cultivated with regular industry, and a right of property not only in its productions, but in the soil itself, is completely ascertained.⁹⁸

In essence, all information concerning the savage needed to be seen through the lens of his occupation; action made the man and the savage hunted. This statement revealed a formal sophistication not in evidence from the 'philosopher' of the *View*. Dugald Stewart has misled commentators in categorising this section of Robertson's text as a 'natural history'. From this point on, Book IV is better understood as an application of a particularly Scottish model of historical jurisprudence, one that took its bearings from the writings of Samuel Pufendorf. The juridical origins of Book IV are revealed in its structure. It abandoned humanist narrative altogether in favour of a geometrical mode of argumentation – one of axioms followed by proofs – favoured by the natural jurist. More

⁹⁷ 'The European colonies have cleared and cultivated a few spots along the coast, but the original race of inhabitants, as rude and indolent as ever, have done nothing to open or improve a country, possessing almost every advantage of situation and climate.' *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 15-16.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 111.

fundamentally Book IV dealt with all the categories of Pufendorbian natural jurisprudence, the individual, family, children, political obligation, form of government, natural religion and war and peace. Yet Book IV was no straightforward Pufendorbian exercise in delineating the rights and duties of citizens and sovereigns. Savage society of the type Robertson was to describe lies utterly beyond the reach of a seventeenth-century jurist; it lacked property, subordination, and a regular system of government. Yet by the mid-1770s, Robertson had a developed body of Scottish historical jurisprudence on which to draw in this context. Both Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man* and John Millar's *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* had by then appeared, two works that took conjectural history beyond the study of the *feuda* towards a more universal narrative of the improvement of human sociability and refinement. Robertson deployed the insights of these works to his very specific narrative ends, to show that the savage method of warfare had the deepest possible roots in savage society. The hunter fought like he hunted.

The hunter was a relatively improved savage, whose art introduced a new ethos to savage life. Hunting was a dangerous, manly pursuit, and the successful hunter enjoyed veneration second only to that reserved for the warrior. For hunting further required skill, patience and a certain ingenuity, and served to strike the first beat in the march of the savage mind. 'While engaged in this favourite exercise,' Robertson wrote, 'they shake off the indolence peculiar to their nature, the latent powers and vigour of their mind are roused, and they become active, persevering, and indefatigable.'⁹⁹ Ingenuity 'sharpened by emulation' then led to that rudimentary technology that aided the hunt. Hunting alone, however, was rarely sufficient to procure subsistence, and the experience of deprivation

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 115.

soon – Robertson’s timeline was here somewhat unclear – drove the savage to limited cultivation. The fruits of cultivation, principally maize and that poisonous parsnip *manioc*, could only serve as a sporadic supplementary food source. Developed agriculture required the domestication of animals and the employment of metal tools, but being unnecessary to subsistence, these advances remained as yet beyond the hunter’s reach. It had become a truism of Scottish historical jurisprudence that the invention of animal husbandry was a crucial stage in the progress of society, and one that could not be bypassed. The animal kingdom had been man’s first and most necessary conquest, without which, Robertson claimed man was a ‘monarch who has no subjects; a master, without servants, and must perform every operation by the strength of his own arm.’¹⁰⁰ Indians did not lack tameable beasts; rather they would not exploit the bison and reindeer that roamed in abundance. But instead of being the sovereign; he was the enemy of his non-human fellow creatures. Robertson understood the life of the hunter as poorly in tune with the balance of nature; ‘he wastes and destroys,’ Robertson wrote, ‘but he does not know how to multiply or govern them.’¹⁰¹ Book III had shown that the technological gap between the savage and the citizen was no small contributor to the latter’s supremacy, and to account for this Robertson complicated the stadial model by suggesting that metals were perhaps as important as animals to the conquest of the natural world. The most useful metal, iron, required human industry to become useful, and this the savage conspicuously lacked. Metals were necessary for two reasons; first as weapons and second as agricultural tools.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 123.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 124.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 125-127.

Thus, Scottish science, with its emphasis on the causal relationship between need and refinement, rendered the study of the savage as an investigation into absences as much as positive qualities, thus opening itself up to Ferguson's criticism that all a property based stadial history could accomplish would be to peel off layers of civility. Robertson seemed relatively unperturbed by this criticism, and highlighted four key political consequences for a people who lacked a system of agriculture. First, no society of hunters could be very large or cohesive; as the 'beast of prey' was a solitary creature, so was the hunter he resembled. Robertson's second point hinted at the logic of dispossession; the savage had no conception of the property he did not possess. 'As long as hunting continues to be the chief employment of man to which he trusts for subsistence' Robertson wrote, 'he can hardly be said to have occupied the earth.'¹⁰³ This was a crucial point for any argument that sought to present natives as undeserving of the land at their disposal; occupation had long been the primary juridical foundation of property rights. Third, with no meaningful sense of subordination, every savage possessed a keen sense of his own independence. Personal qualities may well have risen up a temporary leader on the battlefield, but such status did not outlive hostilities. Fourth, that sense of independence rendered the subordination necessary to any government impossible. 'Where the right of separate and exclusive possession is not introduced,' Robertson maintained, 'the great object of law and jurisdiction does not exist.'¹⁰⁴ To the extent that any sort of justice may be said to have existed among savages, it was the private justice of families motivated from revenge. The apparently superior capacity for subordination to tribal chiefs evident in such tribes as the Natchez

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 130.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 133.

and the Bogata could be explained as a function of their small steps toward improvement, and even more decisively as a function of priestly powers exercised by their chiefs and the superstitions in which it was embroiled. Just as true religion was the building block of the social order, so superstition served as the chains of despotism. 'By its fatal influence, the human mind, in every stage of its progress, is depressed, and its native vigour and independence subdued,' Robertson wrote. 'Whoever can acquire the direction of this formidable empire, is secure of dominion over his species.'¹⁰⁵

The nature of savage superstition was thus key to understanding their notion of political obligation. Unfortunately, in Robertson's mind, missionaries, who were only interested in establishing links, however tenuous, between the belief systems of the savages and revealed doctrine, had primarily carried out the study of savage religion.¹⁰⁶ The three hundred and forty seven 'tedious pages in quarto' of Lafitau represented for Robertson the nadir of this naively neo-Thomist and Jesuitical approach.¹⁰⁷ Using the categories of natural religion, Robertson introduced his discussion with the two cardinal theological tenets on which rational agents based their religious beliefs, namely the existence of a single God and the immortality of the soul. The undeveloped state of the savage mind was such as to find these concepts unintelligible, and it was notable that many of the simplest tribes did not acknowledge the existence of a Creator or even have the word in their language. Robertson followed Hume's *Natural History of Religion* in maintaining that the original impulse towards religion was the sense of dread that arose

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 143.

¹⁰⁶ The prevalence of such a tendency in European tendency has been described by Anthony Pagden as 'the principle of attachment. It was just this tendency that Robertson sought to combat. A. Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, pp. 17-49.

¹⁰⁷ *America*, vol. II, p. 470. For the contrast between the Augustinian and the Neo-Thomist approach to the study of the American Indian, see P. Goddard, 'Augustine and the Amerindian in Seventeenth-Century New France', *Church History*, 67 (1998), pp. 662-681.

from the unseen. Benevolent deities could be left to perform their good offices unaided by sacrifice, but malicious spirits required appeasement. If the Presbyterian minister fascinatingly did not hold monotheism itself natural, he did find belief in the immortality of the soul to be so. The least cultivated of savages imagined an afterlife more pleasant than the present; even the hunter pined for his happy hunting ground.¹⁰⁸ To the extent that there existed a savage priestcraft, this was the preserve, in the first instance, of the witch doctor, who alone could channel the necessary magic to cure disease. In time, however, the witch-doctor would become a priest with the power to secure access to the afterlife.¹⁰⁹ Robertson was quietly making the point that a religious culture of this sort was not one that was favourable for nurturing Christian belief. A mind unprepared for the abstract thought revealed doctrine relied upon was not to acquire such a capacity at gunpoint; the attempt forcibly to convert the natives was a fool's errand. A further implication was that the traditional Spanish legitimating discourse of just war against infidels fell apart because, from the vantage point of Indian conversion, it could not be effective.

Delivering the savage from his pathological '*ius gentium*' was a more compelling rationale for intervention. For Robertson, America, perhaps even more than the Europe of the dark ages, was in a state of nature such as Hobbes or Pufendorf would have recognised. Both were locked into a condition of perpetual ferocity, rapine and war. On the other hand, for Robertson, man living in such a state was hardly living naturally, according to the principles of his own sociable nature. He might have claimed that lacking property or sense of interest, the savage lacked the patience, industry, or sense of

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 191-192.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 196-198.

wronged entitlement required to engage in a war of all against all. If that had been the case, however, the Indian and the Spaniard would never have found themselves in conflict. Instead, Robertson argued that the savage possessed a ferociously keen sense of entitlement regarding his use of traditional tribal hunting grounds and was careful to note these were considered perfect rights that it was legitimate to preserve by force.¹¹⁰ Like John Millar, Robertson was taking issue with Smith in holding these 'natural rights' adventitious and was able to conclude, this time against Ferguson, that a society of hunters would entirely lack a sense of interest.¹¹¹ But tribal interest was not the only, or even the primary, spring of savage warfare; more powerful was the passion for revenge. If resentment was the guiding passion of the mind in the feudal state, revenge was the mechanism through which conflict in the state of nature needed to be understood. Savages carefully inculcated the duty of revenge to their children. The very simplicity of the savage mind rendered its fixation on this principle all the more intense and all the more dangerous. 'When under the dominion of this passion,' Robertson wrote, 'man becomes the most cruel of all the animals. He neither pities, nor forgives, nor spares.'¹¹²

This was to suggest that Adam Ferguson was right in believing that if savage society possessed any sort of 'policy' it was to preserve tribal hunting territories. Such a view naturally had the most important implications for the sort of statecraft Britons should follow in their dealings with Indians. A savage was simply incapable of statecraft, as a European would recognise it.¹¹³ The savage mind seemed for Robertson to be

¹¹⁰ Robertson would have been well aware of the natural jurist's distinction between 'perfect' and 'imperfect' rights.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 146.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 147.

¹¹³ Robertson stated that the exception to this rule was the Iroquois, which he promised to discuss at a later point but frustratingly did not. His exception of the Iroquois was particularly maddening in that this was the very tribe in which both Britain and France had been in vexed negotiation for the duration of

formed for dissimulation. 'Impenetrably secret in forming their measures, they pursue them with a patient undeviating attention, and there is no refinement of dissimulation which they cannot employ, in order to ensure their success.'¹¹⁴ Robertson here employed the language of reason of state to drive home the point that savages were unreliable allies, the belated recognition of which had caused Britain much blood and treasure.

So far as Robertson was concerned, all other aspects of savage warfare could be reduced to the principle that savages fight as they hunt. Savage armies, such as they were, were small, swift and unencumbered. Their warfare, initiated by a desire for revenge, required tactics antithetical to the tactics of wars fought for honour or glory. To the savage, European martial practice seemed merely foolish. No hunter could see the point of meeting the enemy face to face, or feel that he had gained anything by dying in accordance with certain formalised procedures. What was fame to a mind that could not conceive of it? Robertson criticised those who argued that the principles of savage warfare were evidence of their lack of courage; it was only natural for small communities not to seek to expend life capriciously. On the other hand, he commented ominously, their military culture made them vulnerable to armies possessed of a sense of discipline and subordination.¹¹⁵ Thus, savage societies could not be expected to respect laws of war that were alien to their culture. For Europeans, the most frightening aspect of savage war lay in its treatment of prisoners. Indians felt a right to replace warriors they had lost. For early modern European commentators, and in this Robertson was no exception, the practice was most notable as a violation of one of the most cardinal tenets of the *ius gentium*, the injunction not to torture prisoners. Even a commentator such as James

the Seven Years War.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 219.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 168.

Adair, whose *History of the American Indians* principally sought to present his subjects as 'red-Hebrews' could not resist a direct comparison between savage and Popish methods of torture.¹¹⁶ Yet Robertson was equally fascinated by savage torture and the capacity of savages to endure that torture. Savages, after all, primarily tortured other savages. 'They talk, they eat, they sleep, as if they were perfectly at ease, and no danger was impending.'¹¹⁷ While Adair mocked savage indifference to pain by comparison to crazed, self-flagellating Portuguese women, for Robertson the savage never seemed more truly human as when demonstrating an 'invincible constancy' unto the hour of his death.¹¹⁸ The savage heathen knew how to die. Robertson thus rendered intelligible that aspect of savage society European observers found so abhorrent and perplexing. What seemed the most vicious was actually the most virtuous aspect of savage morals. This savage constancy was the result of a distinct process of socialisation. Native American society carefully inculcated the virtue of constancy in their youth. Young warriors would vie with each other to prove themselves the most patient, and thus constancy became honourable and deserving of esteem. Had Robertson concluded his discussion of the treatment of prisoners with this poetic description of savage constancy, the historian

¹¹⁶ 'The women make a furious onset with their burning torches: his pain is soon excruciating, that he rushes out from the pole, with the fury of the most savage beast of prey, and with the vine sweeps down all before him, kicking, biting, and trampling them, with the greatest despite. The circle immediately fills again, either with the fame, or fresh persons: they attack him on every side –now he runs to the pole for shelter, but the flames pursue him. Then with champing teeth, and sparkling eye-balls, he breaks through their contracted circle afresh, and acts every part, that the highest courage, most raging fury, and blackest despair can prompt him to. But he is sure to be over-powered by numbers, and after some time the fire affects his tender parts. –Then they pour over him a quantity of cold water, and allow him a proper time of respite, till his spirits recover, and he is capable of suffering new tortures. Then the like cruelties are repeated till he falls down, and happily becomes insensible of pain. Now they scalp him, and dismember and carry off all the exterior branches of the body, (pudendis non exceptis) in shameful, and savage triumph. This is the most favourable treatment their devoted captives receive: it would be too shocking to humanity either to give, or peruse, every particular of their conduct in such doleful tragedies –nothing can equal these scenes, but those of the mericful Romish inquisition.' James Adair, *A History of the American Indians*, p. 264.

¹¹⁷ *America*, vol. II, p. 156.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp 156-158, 164.

would have struck a distinctly Rousseauian note. But in his next sentence, Robertson sharply changed key with a discussion of savage cannibalism. Savages did not consume their enemies from necessity, but to placate their lust for revenge. Yet this practice too was tinged with some humanity. Warriors only ate respected enemies; women and children were typically spared. Robertson had thus again gone some way towards demystifying what seemed most horrible and unfathomable in savage behaviour.¹¹⁹

It was Robertson's intention to render savage society intelligible, not to render it praiseworthy. Fundamental to Robertson's understanding of the savage and fundamental to his justification of a modified version of Spanish practice was that savage society was locked in time and place. The North American Indian was incapable of autonomously sustainable development and was even, perhaps, in a state of decline. The population of the Indians was declining as a result of incessant warfare and was in any case no match for the armies of more developed nations. The Aztecs and Incas had easily over-run their less developed neighbours, and were themselves easily over-run by the Spanish. The worry was that the savage himself was locked into a cycle of violence, yet, as the events of Book III revealed, was most at risk from the violence of others.¹²⁰ As discussed in the introduction, the otherwise highly sympathetic Edmund Burke found Robertson's handling of the character of the savage a little one sided, as would Dugald Stewart in his biographical sketch of the historian. An otherwise friendly *Monthly* reviewer voiced a similar reservation.

One omission in this enquiry into the state of the Americans we cannot help taking notice of, and that is, a total silence concerning their eloquence and their songs, which forms such an important article in the history of savage nations. We are of opinion also that, upon the whole, he under-rates the

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 158-161.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 167-168.

savage character.¹²¹

As any reader of *Ossian* would have noticed immediately, Robertson's primitives hunted and fought, but they did not sing.

Yet this truncated portrait of the savage character was necessary to Robertson's purposes. Comprehension of the spectacular failure of savage society to maintain itself in the face of Spanish aggression would not be aided by garnishing it with primitivist romance. A society without a system of property and a developed agriculture lacked the technology, discipline and subordination necessary to prevail against a regiment of citizens. Lacking the capacity for jealousy and emulation, the spurs that had led to the spread of improvement in Europe, they were incapable of learning from the Spanish. It was this that allowed Robertson to argue that European intervention was essential to the improvement of American civilisation and it was this that forced Robertson, in spite of his hatred of slavery, to support the plans of the Brothers of St. Joseph to moderate, but not eliminate, the practice of forced labour. The analysis of Book IV gave support to the prudence of their notion that a prerequisite of Indian improvement was to treat them as they were, not as one would wish them to be. And while this did not lessen the scale of the evils the Spanish had inflicted on the Americans, it did go some way towards suggesting how these crimes might have been part of God's plan. The most sordid crimes, however, were yet to come.

Having thus performed an unprecedented exercise in enlightened jurisprudence to delineate the principles from which the savage waged war, Robertson was in a position to employ these insights in the two large set piece confrontations of Spanish conquest, the conquests of the empires of Mexico and Peru. One would have expected an historical

¹²¹ *The Monthly Review*, Vol. 57 (August, 1777), p. 128.

narration of these conquests to address head-on the issue that had long provided the crux of debate over their significance for the legitimacy of Spanish empire, whether the wars of Cortés and Pizarro were just wars and the possibility of the derivation of *dominium* from conquest.¹²² As has been discussed in terms of the relationship between Books III and IV, Robertson rejected the Spanish notion that just war could be waged against the Indians on grounds of their idolatry, or that those wars had been conducted in accordance with the *ius gentium*. Robertson had instead hinted that the traditionally British argument for *imperium* based upon the promise of improvement provided a more secure basis for the legitimacy of Spanish actions. Legitimacy thus rested upon prudent conduct, which had not been the resource Spain had thus far chosen to mine in the Americas. Robertson wanted to concentrate on the statesmanship of Cortés and Pizarro, which would be tested most profoundly in dealing with a civilisation they could not understand. The conquest narratives of Books V and VI continued the theme of the corruption of what had been an inspiring moment in human history. For the spirit of enterprise had been corrupted by the love of gold and the desire to convert pagans, a combination of superstition and enthusiasm that had produced the most dreadful results. As Robertson was put it in the conclusion of his narration of the conquest of Mexico: 'In almost every district of the Mexican empire, the progress of the Spanish arms is marked with blood, and with deeds so atrocious, as to disgrace the enterprising valour that conducted them to success.'¹²³ It remained to be seen whether Mexico and Peru were sufficiently underdeveloped to sanction a Spanish *imperium* to improve them.

¹²² A. Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, p. 93.

¹²³ *America*, vol. II, p. 403.

Most of what Robertson wished to applaud in this part of the narrative was the statesmanship of Cortés. Cortés, once a dissolute youth, had grown more confident and prudent as his responsibilities had grown.¹²⁴ As ever, for Robertson, it was a mark of a man's greatness to be able to arouse fear and jealousy in his rivals, and this Cortés was able to instil. The suspicion and hostilities of the governor of Cuba, Diego Velasquez, nearly thwarted Cortés' mission before it began. Only Cortés' superior ability to ingratiate himself with his own men, to appeal to their honour and their avarice, salvaged his personal authority. In European terms, Cortés' forces were small in number, lightly armed and without armour. But even so, Robertson pointed out, they had an easy and rewarding early victory over the natives of an offshore island; one of the women captives was to prove invaluable as a translator. In Book II, Robertson had emphasised the cultural gulf that separated the Indians and the Spanish. Cortés and the Mexicans had found it easier to understand each other, and Robertson was able to write of their dealings in terms of a language of diplomacy as traditionally understood. Even so, cultural difference continued to provide a constant source of misunderstandings that Robertson noted with care. On their first encounter with the Spaniards, Mexican emissaries had offered their trinkets in the hope that they would go away. The effect of these gift offerings was to trigger Cortés' avarice and lead him to insist that he be given an audience with the Aztec emperor in his remote capital.¹²⁵ It was a diplomatic episode that led Robertson to

¹²⁴ 'The impetuosity of his temper, when he came to act with his equals, insensibly abated, by being kept under restraint, and melted into a cordial soldierly frankness. These qualities were accompanied with calm prudence in concerting his schemes, with persevering vigour in executing them, and with what is peculiar to superior genius, the art of gaining the confidence and governing the minds of men.' *Ibid.* vol. II, p. 235.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 247.

marvel at the efficacy of the Mexican intelligence networks that made such rapid communications with the capital possible, and exceeded that of Europe¹²⁶

Robertson pointed out that Mexico needed such impressive resources and described the organisation of Mexican government as one that resembled a great monarchy. Mexico was vast in territorial scope and comparatively recently established. Its ruler, Montezuma himself had all the attributes Europeans feared in an absolute monarch:

Of all the princes who had swayed the Mexican sceptre, he was the most haughty, the most violent, and the most impatient of control. His subjects looked up to him with awe, and his enemies with terror. The former he governed with unexampled rigour, but they were impressed with such an opinion of his capacity, as commanded their respect; and, by many victories over the latter, he had spread far the dread of his arms, and had added several considerable provinces to his dominions.¹²⁷

For the other peoples of the mainland, like the Zempoallans, Montezuma was primarily an object of fear; 'a tyrant, as the cazique told him with tears, haughty, cruel, and suspicious; who treated his own subjects with arrogance, ruined the conquered provinces by excessive exactions, and often tore their sons and daughters from them by violence.'¹²⁸ Hearing the groans of the Zempoallas, 'a ray of light and hope broke in upon the mind of Cortés'. He realised that Montezuma would be loathed by these peoples and persuaded them that he had come as their liberator. His policy was nearly undermined by religious enthusiasm, however, when Cortés and his men stripped and tore down local altars and statues. The Zempoallans would thenceforth view their liberators with some suspicion.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 249.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 252-253.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 266.

Cortés' also sought an alliance with the Tlascalans, a Spartan people possessing a deep suspicion of strangers who greeted the Spaniards with drawn swords.¹²⁹ Robertson did not narrate the war, as 'no power of words can render the recital of a combat interesting, where there is no equality of danger; and when the narrative closes with an account of thousands slain on the one side, while not a single person falls on the other, the most laboured description of the previous disposition of the troops, or of the various vicissitudes in the engagement, command no attention.'¹³⁰ Now that the reader had the advantage of the philosophy of Book IV, narration of such conflict was no longer necessary. Relations with this people followed the pattern established with the Zempoallans, Cortés offering military alliance against the Mexicans in return for their oath of loyalty to the Castilian crown. Again Cortés nearly wrecked the arrangement through an imprudent display of zeal. A thoughtful cleric, Robertson was happy to note, cautioned him against such an imprudent act against such a proud people and thus preserved their alliance.¹³¹

The most salient feature of the eventual taking of the city of Mexico was the striking ease with which it was accomplished. Robertson's narrative provided a number of explanations for this. It was the nature of a despotic monarchy such as the Mexican's to be loathed by its subject peoples who provided necessary intelligence at key moments concerning Montezuma's intentions. More fundamentally, the superstition of the

¹²⁹ 'A fierce people, shut up within narrow precincts, and little accustomed to any intercourse with foreigners, is apt to consider every stranger as an enemy, and is easily excited to arms'. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 277.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 279.

¹³¹ 'Amidst scenes, where a narrow-minded bigotry appears in such close union with oppression and cruelty, sentiments so liberal and humane soothe the mind with unexpected pleasure; and at a time when the rights of conscience were little understood in the Christian world, and the idea of toleration unknown, one is astonished to find a Spanish monk of the sixteenth century among the first advocates against persecution, and in behalf of religious liberty.' *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 288.

Mexicans caused them to see the Spanish as divinities more formidable than the real virtues of their superior technology and discipline actually rendered them. A savage emperor, no matter how great, was incapable of true statecraft, and in this fundamental sense, Montezuma was no match for the superior abilities of Cortés.

Robertson stressed the fact that the fall of Montezuma was almost achieved without the loss of blood. Unable to understand the consequences of this or to seize the opportunity to prevent it, the Emperor allowed himself to be captured and shackled. The population would probably have submitted passively, were it not for another disastrous act of policy motivated solely by superstition and enthusiasm, the destruction and looting of Mexican holy places. Open hostilities with the Mexicans ensued, with predictably bloody results, exacerbated by the Spanish contagion, small pox.¹³²

Robertson bestowed a stoical dignity on Montezuma, who acquiesced to his fate 'neither with the sullen fierceness of a barbarian, nor with the dejection of a suppliant.' The importance of this moment was such that Robertson accorded him a dignity he afforded to precious few of his characters, the power of speech. 'I have done', said he, addressing himself to the Spanish general, 'what became a monarch. I have defended my people to the last extremity. Nothing now remains but to die'.¹³³ Unto the hour of his death, Robertson's Montezuma had shown a true nobility of character.

But Robertson was careful not to sentimentalise the death of Montezuma and the fall of Mexico. Considering the extent of his empire and the sophistication of the society over which he ruled, Montezuma should have proven a truly formidable enemy. Yet

¹³² 'This distemper, which raged at the time in New Spain with fatal malignity, was unknown in that quarter of the globe, until it was introduced by the Europeans, and may be reckoned among the greatest calamities brought upon them by their invaders.' *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 361.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 386.

Montezuma's nobility was not that of a European; he remained a savage in the grip of the very superstition that provided the base of his rule. Montezuma, the savage emperor was overturned by the jealousy of neighbours who dreaded his power, and by the revolt of subjects impatient to shake of its yoke.¹³⁴ This, together with advanced military technology, disease and, above all, Cortés' skilful generalship had had more to do with the conquest of Mexico than the supposed heroism of Spanish soldiers. It was not a conclusion that modern Spaniards could be expected to find comfortable.¹³⁵

Robertson now presented Cortés as a Mexican legislator, creating a New Spain as flawed as the parent colony of Hispaniola. After he had rebuilt Tenochtetlan, his men discovered a series of mines, and it was on the basis of these discoveries that Cortés established his plan for the settlement of Mexico. Robertson emphasised that settlement was to be on the basis of grants of property in the form of Indians rather than land and he noted that with the remaining provinces, the Spaniards had become increasingly imperious in their treatment of the natives that stood in their way.¹³⁶ As Robertson commented,

fatally for the honour of their country, the Spaniards sullied the glory redounding for these repeated victories by their mode of treating the vanquished people. After taking Guatimazin, and becoming masters of his capital, they supposed that the king of Castile entered on possession of all the rights of the captive monarch, and affected to consider every effort of the Mexicans to assert their own independence, as the rebellion of vassals against their sovereign, or the mutiny of slaves against their master. Under the sanction of those ill-founded maxims, *they violated every right that should be held sacred between hostile nations. After each insurrection, they reduced the common people in the provinces which they subdued, to*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 387.

¹³⁵ 'How much soever this account of the reduction of Mexico may detract, on the one hand, from the marvelous relations of some Spanish writers, by ascribing that to simple and obvious causes which they attribute to the romantic valour of their countrymen, it adds, on the other, to the merit and abilities of Cortes, who, under every disadvantage, acquired such an ascendant over unknown nations, as to render them instruments towards carrying his schemes to execution.' *Ibid.* vol. II, p. 388.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

*the most humiliating of all conditions, that of personal servitude.*¹³⁷

As the Spanish considered all Indians subhuman, the Mexicans were naturally outside the sphere of the *ius gentium* and their persons and possessions were ripe for destruction. Therefore, all was permissible. The mass burnings were no crime of passion but a calculated military decision against a people whose cultural integrity they simply did not acknowledge.¹³⁸

Yet it was not Robertson's purpose to condemn too harshly. He was at pains to point out that the treatment of Mexican labourers moderated over time, incorporating 'many useful and humane regulations for the preservation of the Indians.'¹³⁹ He noted that as the number of mines had increased and the problems of working them became increasingly difficult, the Spaniards learned to value Indian labour more and treated the workforce with greater humanity. Cortés' statesmanship had been far from perfect, but had laid the foundations of an empire that had improved in time. He had died, Robertson noted, as Columbus had died, ill-treated and under-appreciated by a court for which he accomplished so much.

In turning to the conquest of Peru, Robertson had to confront the very different personality of Pizarro. His character, Robertson thought, was due to a faulty upbringing; 'he had been so totally neglected in his youth by the author of his birth, that it seems to have destined him never to rise beyond the condition of his mother.'¹⁴⁰ As a result he had grown up to be a character nearly devoid of positive qualities. Pizarro's true education occurred at Hispaniola, where he was inculcated in the superstition of gold and the

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 403.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 404.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 406.

¹⁴⁰ *The History of America*, vol. III, p. 3.

viability of Indian slavery. The conquest of Peru itself was, as Raynal had seen, a blend of religious enthusiasm and imperial excess. In a passage worthy of Voltaire, Robertson described how Pizarro's chaplain 'celebrated mass, divided a consecrated host into three, and reserving one part to himself, gave the other two to his associates, of which they partook; and thus, in the name of the Prince of Peace, ratified a contract of which plunder and bloodshed were the objects.'¹⁴¹ Pizarro's men were portrayed as a gang of adventurers and not a disciplined force, sharing the vices and lacking the virtues of Cortés men. It was no small part of their crimes that they destroyed a civilisation that was far more advanced than any other in the New World. Robertson portrayed an organised, ingenious people with a system of husbandry, where animals had been domesticated and metal tools were used and where there was evidence of refinement that surpassed that to be found in Europe.¹⁴²

Like the Aztec empire, the Incan empire showed signs of corruption, but not of a sort to arouse the indignation of a European observer. Incan civil society was still essentially functional and capable of improvement.¹⁴³ Indeed, its empire was run on a principle that any Whig could approve. 'It was not the rage of conquest, if we may believe the accounts of their countrymen, that prompted the Incas to extend their dominion, but the desire of diffusing the blessings of civilization, and the knowledge of the arts which they possessed, among the barbarous people whom they reduced.'¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ *America*, vol. III, p. 5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, vol III, p. 12.

¹⁴³ Monco Capac and Mama Orollo, for such were the names of the extraordinary personages, having thus collected some wandering tribes, formed that social union, which, by multiplying the desires, and uniting the efforts of the human species, excites industry, and leads to improvements' *Ibid.*, vol III, p. 24.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

The contrast between Inca and Spaniard could not have been more pronounced. In their hunger for gold 'the Spaniards pursued them towards every quarter, and with deliberate and unrelenting barbarity continued to slaughter wretched fugitives, who never once offered to resist.'¹⁴⁵ Their subjection of a province complete, Pizarro's men divided their treasure as pirates graced by the Almighty to loot and destroy.¹⁴⁶

Robertson's indignation rose to fever pitch on the murder of the Inca; he characterised the incident as 'the most criminal and atrocious that stains the Spanish name, amidst all the deeds of violence committed in carrying on the conquest of the New World'.¹⁴⁷ For him, the incident was the most complete example of the role reversal between civilised and barbarian that the conquest of America had to offer. The Inca was a person of sensibility, fully able to respond sympathetically to Pizarro and to penetrate his thoughts. But efforts hit up against a brick wall. Pizarro, consumed with resentment, was incapable of the slightest feeling of pity.¹⁴⁸ Even his own men were horrified and implored him not to execute the Inca. Their own protests were ineffectual, but Robertson was careful to note them, remarking that history 'records even the most unsuccessful exertions of virtue with applause'.¹⁴⁹ Once again Robertson carefully noted the effect of the execution of a ruler on a society whose organisation was entirely dependent on his will. Wild anarchy resulted from seeing the Inca in chains. From their perspective, the

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ 'The festival of St James, the patron saint of Spain, was the day chosen for the partition of this enormous sum, and the manner of conducting it strongly marks that strange alliance of fanaticism with avarice, which I have more than once had occasion to point out as a striking feature in the character of the consequences of the New World. Though assembled to divide the spoils of an innocent people, procured by deceit, extortion, and cruelty, the transaction began with a solemn invocation to the name of God, as if they could have expected the guidance of heaven in distributing those wages of iniquity'.
Ibid., vol. III, p. 40.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 43.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 48.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 49.

Incas had lost not only their king but also their God. Religion being the driving force of their culture, and outrage at the murderous blasphemy of the Spanish proved the turning point in terms of collective psychology. The Incas now secretly prepared a concerted national effort to expel the Spanish.

In telling the history of the conquest of Peru, Robertson's interest was less in rehearsing a grim story of genocide, than in emphasising that these were events perpetrated by thugs who were beyond the control of the Spanish court. Ferdinand and Charles V had been preoccupied with European affairs and Charles had been horrified to learn of what had transpired.¹⁵⁰ These were hardly conditions in which successful colonisation was possible. These adventurers were motivated by greed, and the logic of their greed was genocide.¹⁵¹ As Robertson pointed out, the irony of this was that this greed could only be satisfied with an effective labour force. With Charles' express approval, prudent men such as Mendiza and Sandoval put in place legislation to promote humane working conditions for the natives.

Events did not allow Robertson to end on this relatively conciliatory note. The civil unrest that was perhaps inevitable in a colony so ill-founded provided the philosophical historian with a display of 'such an uncommon state of manners, as to merit particular attention.' The Spanish had succeeded in reproducing in America the rapine

¹⁵⁰ 'It is manifest from all the events recorded in the history of America, that rapid and extensive as the Spanish conquests had been, they were not carried on by any regular exertion of national force, but by the occasional efforts of private adventurers. After fitting out a few of the first armaments for discovering new regions, the court of Spain, during the busy reigns of Ferdinand and Charles V., the former the most intriguing prince of the age, and the latter the most ambitious, was encumbered with such a multiplicity of schemes, and involved in war with so many nations of Europe, that it had not leisure to attend to distant and less interesting objects'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 98.

¹⁵¹ 'The rude conquerors of America, incapable of forming their establishments upon any general or extensive plan of policy, attentive only to private interest, unwilling to forego present gain from the prospect of remote or public benefit, seem to have had to object but to amass sudden wealth, without regarding what might be the consequences of the means by which they acquired it'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 99.

and turmoil experienced in Europe after the fall of Rome from which the feudal military monarchies had developed. 'Every adventurer in Peru considered himself a conqueror,' Robertson explained, and, like the warriors of the early feudal age he was valued by himself and by those who followed him for his success on the battlefield. As modern Spaniards assumed the role of their feudal ancestors, so their minds regressed to the values of that more barbarous form of civilisation. 'Amidst the disorder and turbulence which accompanied this total dissolution of the frame of government,' Robertson remarked ruefully, 'the minds of men, set loose from the ordinary restraints of law and authority, acted with such capricious irregularity that events no less extraordinary than unexpected followed in a rapid succession.'¹⁵² Robertson's language to describe this dissolution of the ties of obligation employed the insights of Scottish social theory to produce a newly enriched description of corruption.

Such a rapid change of fortune produced its natural effects. It gave birth to new wants, and new desires. Veterans, long accustomed to hardship and toil, acquired of a sudden a taste for profuse and inconsiderate dissipation, and indulged in all the excesses of military licentiousness. The riot of low debauchery occupied some; a relish for expensive luxuries spread among others. The meanest soldier in Peru would have thought himself degraded by marching on foot.¹⁵³

This did not mean that the Spanish were no longer capable of their old valour on the field, but such bursts of vigour were short-lived, and there was no true glory to be found in them. Spanish corruption had progressed to such a point that all sense of shame was lost. Not only had the Spaniard regressed to the point at which his capacity for sympathy and moral exchange became impossible, but 'during their dissensions, there was hardly a Spaniard in Peru who did not abandon the party which he had originally espoused, betray the associates with whom he had united, and violate the engagements under which he had

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 116.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 140.

come.¹⁵⁴ There was no honour even among thieves; mutual faith and trust had collapsed under the weight of unleashed animal appetites. As discussed in chapter four, Hume had found late sixteenth-century France in the height of religiously inspired civil war to have experienced a similar dissolution of society. Robertson was unlikely to have felt comfortable with Hume's reading of that chapter of history, and spent a considerable portion of his *Charles V* undermining the premises of Hume's analysis, but the two did share a horrified fascination in the mechanism of such dissolution.

Instances of such general and avowed contempt for the principles and obligations which attach man to man, and bind them together in social union, rarely occur in history. It is only where men are far removed from the seat of government, where the restraints of law and order are little felt, where the prospect of gain is unbounded, and where immense wealth may cover the crimes by which it is required, that we can find any parallel to the levity, the rapaciousness, the perfidy and corruption prevalent among the Spaniards in Peru.¹⁵⁵

That men flourish when subordinated to law was a point Robertson had made often enough over the course of his narrative. Only at this point, however, did he make plain just how urgently man's social passions required the discipline of regular government. A headily destructive concoction of antisocial passions had conspired to precipitate this dissolution of society. 'Vanity, avarice, emulation, envy, shame, rage, and all the other passions which most vehemently agitate the minds of men when both their honour and their interest are deeply affected,' Robertson advanced, 'conspired in adding to its violence.'¹⁵⁶

The grim spectacle of dissolution ended the narration of events of *The History of America*. Robertson did not enter into a detailed retelling of them; it was enough to have revealed their internal logic. To have ended his work there would have rendered the

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 142.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 143.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 145.

narrative one of bitter tragedy, a tale of how immoderate enterprise fell prey to avarice and barbarism. But Robertson did not consider his work a bitter tragedy, and did not end his work with the collapse of Spanish civility. It bears pointing out in this context that lengthy sections on British America would have followed, but that these were ultimately omitted for reasons to be explored below. In the version eventually published, two weighty analytical books did follow, the first on the manners of the Mexicans and the Peruvians, the second an overview of that Spanish colonial policy emulated by the other states of Europe. The purpose of the first of these books was to show why Mexican and Peruvian methods of conducting war left them so defenceless against the Spanish, the purpose of the second to encourage the difficult project of Spanish renewal.

Book VII stands in the same relation to Books V and VI as Book IV had to book III; namely a retreat from narrative into science to explain how the nature of the savage mind left it ripe for easy conquest by men who were by no means their betters. Book VII was a briefer excursion into science than book IV had been, for the simple reason that Book VII presupposed its more general analysis of the savage mind and savage warfare. The specific task Robertson set himself in this book was to establish that despite the many and various advances of the civilisations of these two great empires, their method of war revealed them to be essentially unimproved. As the wars of Cortés could only with difficulty and the wars of Pizarro could not at all be described in terms of the European *ius gentium* as just, the legitimacy of the colonies the Spanish crown had planted in the New World rested upon an analysis of the arrested development of Mexican and Peruvian society.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ 'But if the comparison be made with the people of the ancient continent, the inferiority of America in improvement will be conspicuous, and neither the Mexicans nor Peruvians will be entitled to rank with

The nature of the conduct of war collapsed any distinctions between savages across the Americas that their unequal development in other areas might suggest. 'Like the rude tribes around them', Robertson explained, 'the Mexicans were incessantly engaged in war, and the motives which prompted them to hostility seem to have been the same. They fought, in order to gratify their vengeance, by shedding the blood of their enemies'.¹⁵⁸ For Robertson this was the key to understanding Mexican culture:

In proportion as mankind combine in social union, and live under the influence of equal laws and regular policy, their manners soften, sentiments of humanity arise, and the rights of the species come to be understood. The fierceness of war abates, and even while engaged in hostility, men remember what they owe one to another. The savage fights to destroy, the citizen to conquer. The former neither pities nor spares, the latter has acquired sensibility which tempers his rage. To this sensibility the Mexicans seem to have been perfect strangers, and among them war was carried on with so much barbarity, that we cannot but suspect their degree of civilization to have been highly imperfect.¹⁵⁹

Robertson can be seen here to have turned Ferguson's paradigm against itself. Robertson again followed his friend in holding that war rather than property was indeed built into the *telos* of any stadial theory, but in doing so sought to reclarify waters Ferguson had wished to muddy. For Ferguson, the savage self possessed a rounded integrity of character that for the specialised modern military man was but a distant memory. The savage method of war might seem perplexing to civilised man, but it had no less honour and integrity in its own right. For Ferguson, savage man was fully socialised after his own fashion, while for Robertson he remained an imperfectly socialised individual partly inhabiting a Hobbesian realm.

those nations which merit the name civilized'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 152.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 183.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

The paradox of the Aztecs was that these imperfectly socialised beings were subjects of a powerful military monarchy whose organisation bore an uncanny resemblance to that of early feudal Europe.¹⁶⁰ Under the Smithian model of development often taken to be orthodox among the Scottish literati, Aztec society should thus not be classified as savage. Savage society, subsisting on hunting or fishing, did not yield the rigid division between *meum* and *tuum* that government was instituted to protect. Yet Smith's model was at all times tied to the teleology of the internalisation of property rights, a model to which Robertson did not feel entirely beholden. Robertson was explicit that under the empire of the Aztecs, private property 'was perfectly understood, and established in its full extent.' However, although land was held to be entirely alienable, in practice most land was held in common.

Robertson was convinced that Cortés and the other Spanish had grossly overestimated the size of Mexican cities. However, he did admit that life in these cities was highly complex, and that a division of labour had taken place.¹⁶¹ A reasonably advanced state of commerce existed within these cities, both a product of and productive of a 'persevering and inventive' urban class. However, in contrast to the European developmental model, industrious urbanised life in Mexico was no catalyst for the liberty of the individual. The countryside was in an even more depressed state, resembling the

¹⁶⁰ 'The Mexicans, long after they were established in their new possessions, continued, like other martial tribes in America, unacquainted with regal dominion, and were governed in peace, and conducted in war, by such as were entitled to prominence by their wisdom or their valour. But among them, as in other states whose power and territories became extensive, the supreme authority centred at last on a single person; and when the Spaniards under Cortes invaded the country, Montezuma was the ninth monarch in order who had swayed the Mexican sceptre, not by hereditary right, but by election'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 159.

¹⁶¹ 'In proportion as refinement spreads, the distinction of professions increases, and they branch out into more numerous and minute subdivisions. Among the Mexicans, this separation of the arts necessary in life had taken place to a considerable extent'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 164.

land-tied peasantry of Eastern Europe.¹⁶² Even more wretched than these Mexican serfs was the slave class, the killing of one not counted a criminal offence under Mexican jurisprudence. Unsurprisingly for a society with such a rigid distinction of ranks, forms of social deference were ingrained into every aspect of human interaction, and permeated through Mexican language. Such a society, in Robertson's view, was perfectly prepared to suffer the yoke of despotism.

This despotism was of surprisingly recent origin. Previously, Mexican monarchy had been elective, with the approval of the nobility requisite in any declaration of war. The astute Machiavel in Cortés had intuited the nature of this lingering resentment, and played nobility against monarchy in his successful conquest. The despotism of the Mexican monarchy went some way towards rationalising its conquest as a just war and thus providing the Spanish empire with a modicum of legitimacy. Robertson prudently implied rather than declaimed this last point; it was only a partial mitigation of the crimes of the Spanish that the Mexican people had passed from one despotism to another.

The level of Spanish guilt *vis à vis* the Incas was considerably higher; Pizarro could not be held, even in retrospect, to have been a liberator. This had as much to do with the structure of Incan society as with the criminality of the Spanish adventurers. In Robertson's analysis, the Incas did not conform to the pattern established by the Mexicans. Incan society presented a greater puzzle, a gentle and in many respects a refined civilisation that nonetheless lacked an indigenous motor for its own improvement. Mexican civilisation had been revealed as fundamentally and distastefully savage through

¹⁶² 'The great body of the people was in a most humiliating state. A considerable number, known by the name of *Marizeques*, nearly resembling in condition those peasants who, during the prevalence of the feudal system, as instruments of labour attached to the soil. The *Marizeques* could not change their place of residence without permission of the superior on whom they depended'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 165.

its manner of waging war. The Incas however did not wage war like savages should.

‘They fought not,’ Robertson explained,

like savages, to destroy and exterminate, like the Mexicans, to glut blood-thirsty divinities with human sacrifices. They conquered, in order to reclaim and civilize the vanquished and to diffuse the knowledge of their own institutions and arts. The Incas took the people whom they subdued under their protection, and admitted them to a participation of all the advantages enjoyed by their original subjects. This practice, so repugnant to American ferocity, and resembling the humanity of the most polished nations, must be ascribed, like other peculiarities which we have observed in the Peruvian manners, to the genius of their religion.¹⁶³

The Incans, when they did fight, fought to conquer, but it was questionable for Robertson whether this meant that they could truly be described as citizens. The mildness of Incan religion, not collective vigour or a more precocious sense of justice based upon secure property rights, provided the explanation for their curious approximation of civility. This was not an entirely incongruous assertion for a cleric who held that the progress of Christianity was chiefly responsible for Europe’s present state of civility. Robertson insisted that, unlike the Mexicans, the Incas did not understand private property in the European sense. Families enjoyed annual use rights in allotments granted according to rank. The social consequences of this retrograde land tenure were entirely beneficial.

‘By this singular distribution of territory,’ Robertson explained,

as well as by the mode of cultivating it, the idea of a common interest, and of mutual subserviency, was continually inculcated. Each individual felt his connection with those around him, and knew that he depended on their friendly aid to increase what he was to reap. A state thus constituted may be considered as one great family, in which the union of the members was so complete, and the exchange of good offices so perceptible, as to create stronger attachment, and to bind man into closer intercourse, than subsisted under any form of society established in America.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 209.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 210.

This was language reminiscent of More's *Utopia*, and the second time Robertson had used it to commend a form of communism that seemed to emulate the practice of the Church fathers. The first had been in his treatment of the Jesuits in *Charles V*, where the Society of Jesus had been lauded for establishing a pattern of rule on the basis of a similar system of property, drawn directly from the example of the Paraguayans. But what had seemed within the context of *Charles V* a conciliatory gesture to a form of religious organisation whose time had past now emerged as a more practical lesson in the art of imperial governance. The Jesuits had understood the nature of Indian society and had modelled their rule accordingly. Robertson was particularly impressed by the fact that in both Indian and Jesuit society the sense of each individual working toward the common good was so entrenched that even the children of the emperor and the most senior members of the Society of Jesus employed their own labour in agriculture.¹⁶⁵

There was a tension in Robertson's discussion of the Incans. At times he was keen to emphasise the close social connectedness of this society, at other times to emphasise how their relative unworldliness was due to the very limitations of that social connectedness. He was condescending concerning their low level of artistic achievement, which he attributed to the fact that such a simple society produced few wants and did not specialise sufficiently to produce an independent class of artisans.¹⁶⁶ More germane were the political deficiencies of Incan society. However admirable they might have been as a people, the Incan empire itself was lacking in riches and military

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 214.

¹⁶⁶ 'I have reason to believe that the workmanship is more to be admired on account of the rude tools with which it was executed, than on account of its intrinsic neatness and elegance; and that the Peruvians, though the most improved of all the Americans, were not advanced beyond the infancy of arts'. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 223.

power, a fact Robertson attributed to their low level of commercial development.

Reiterating an argument from his *View* concerning the relationship between urbanisation and the growth of commerce, Robertson wrote:

The activity of commerce is coeval with the foundation of cities; and from the moment that the members of any community settle in considerable numbers in one place, its operations become vigorous. The citizen must depend for subsistence on the labour of those who cultivate the ground. ... There was hardly any species of commerce carried on between different provinces, and the community was less acquainted with that active intercourse, which is at once a bond of union, and an incentive to improvement.¹⁶⁷

The salient deficiency of Incan society was that it utterly lacked martial vigour.

Robertson seemed reticent to ascribe this to any one particular cause. Perhaps it lay in its constitution; perhaps in its enervating climate. 'Whatever may have been the cause,' Robertson insisted, 'the fact is certain, and there is not an instance in history of any people so little advanced in refinement, so totally destitute of military enterprise.'¹⁶⁸ The logic of Robertson's explanation led to the sad conclusion that Incan society was a delicate flower that could not have been expected to survive long in the wild. Its fall was not only inevitable but also willed by providence.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 225.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 226.

Part IV: British America

If the Spanish sections of *The History of America* have understandably attracted a disproportionate degree of attention, the sections on British America have equally understandably attracted far less. These sections seem incomplete and were not published in the historian's lifetime. Yet the balance of probabilities lie in favour of the notion that Robertson wished for the eventual publication of his two books on British America. It would certainly have been in his power to destroy the manuscripts had he wished to do so; he had done as much with the remainder of his drafts and working papers. By the time of his death, Robertson had sat on the manuscript for over fifteen years. With an eye toward posterity, had the historian taken the opportunity to revise or alter his text in the light of unfolding events? The question remains unanswerable. The modern commentator is left with little more than the remaining text itself. The following discussion works on the assumption that Robertson was unlikely to have made substantial alterations in his text. First, the historian's health was shattered by the pressure of rendering the Spanish sections of his history ready for publication, and it was several years before he was able to return to any sort of composition. By the time his health and mental energies had partly returned, other projects occupied his attention, namely the aborted completion of Hume's *History of England* down to the reign of Queen Anne, his substantially altered eleventh edition of *The History of Scotland*, and his final work on India. If this is correct, then the sections on British America would have been completed *before* the problematic valedictory book VIII of the published text, which provided an overview and critique of European colonial practice. The two volumes on the settlement of colonies in British North America were unique in Robertson's *oeuvre* in dealing

primarily with the politically and religiously tumultuous seventeenth century, a period the historian had previously sought to introduce at a safe chronological distance. The history of British America is of additional interest in view of the light it cast on the great history of England he never wrote. But what matters in the present context, is the light this text throws on Robertson's views about the history of Empire in America. One might have thought that Robertson's original strategy in combining the narration of Spanish and British settlement would have been to sharply contrast the brutality of Spanish conquest and the folly of a policy that amounted to little more than lust for gold and souls for their own sake with a glowing providential narrative of patient industry prudently pursued. Such a theme would have been in keeping with the mainstream Whiggery of the day, but this was not Robertson's theme. Robertson, following Raynal, understood a common system of policy informing the various European empires, and understood their histories as fundamentally entwined. Robertson was to portray English – not yet British – settlers as encountering the same problems as had the Spanish, principally those of ordering a body politic far from the seat of government and of the catastrophic results of engaging with a society utterly beyond their comprehension.

Before Robertson could address his principal themes of the problems Englishmen would encounter in the New World, he had briefly to address the jealousy of state policy and the history of religious enthusiasm that brought them there. Chronologically, Book IX began with the European repercussions of the events of Books I through III. News of the exploits and discoveries of Columbus rapidly spread to universal wonder. 'But in England it did something more,' Robertson noted; 'it excited a vehement desire of emulating the glory of Spain, and of aiming to obtain some share in those advantages

which were expected in this new field open to national activity'.¹⁶⁹ Yet England was agonisingly slow in realising its own latent capacity for purposeful, self-interested action. Much of the early sections of book nine described why, as a result of this, English colonisation began in such a halting, uncertain fashion. Robertson repeated the narration of 'technical retardation' Karen O'Brien has described as forming much of the content of Book I, but with the gloss of a jab at stubborn English isolation. 'During the course of two centuries, while industry and commerce were making gradual progress, both in the south and north of Europe,' Robertson maintained, 'the English continued so blind to the advantages of their own situation, that they hardly began to bend their thoughts towards those objects and pursuits to which they are indebted for their present opulence and power.'¹⁷⁰ Yet the spirit of commerce did eventually direct the English commercial class towards a realisation that their interest was greatly augmented through the discovery of distant new markets, as woollen merchants found a ready market for their wares in the Middle East.

Robertson found it puzzling that the normally jealous Henry VIII was not more interested in the glory of overseas empire, particularly as the break with Rome meant that there would have been no legal obstacle to claiming the lands Alexander VI divided between Spain and Portugal. However, Henry was sufficiently preoccupied with his

¹⁶⁹ Robertson, *The History of America*, vol. IV, in *Works*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Robertson's tone was here particularly scathing, almost actively bating his English readers. 'While the trading vessels in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, as well as those of the Hans Towns, visited the remote ports of Europe, and carried on an active intercourse with its various nations, the English did little more than creep along their own coasts, in small barks, which conveyed the productions of one country to another. Their commerce was almost wholly passive. Their wants were supplied by strangers; and whatever necessary of luxury of life their own country did not yield, was imported in foreign bottoms. The cross of St. George was seldom displayed beyond the narrow seas.' *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 3.

unsuccessful attempts to triangulate between Charles and Francis, as well as his tussle with Rome, that he never paid the issue of overseas exploration sufficient attention. Successful merchant adventures to Moscow had the effect of inspiring the emulation of other merchants. Robertson celebrated the nascent commercial zeal of the enterprising English. 'As soon as the activity of the nation was put into motion, it took various directions, and exerted itself in each with that steady, persevering industry which is the soul and guide of commerce.' It was with Elizabeth, however, that English heroic commerce and exploration truly began. During her long and prosperous reign, in which 'attentive economy, which exempted her subjects from the burthen of taxes oppressive to trade,' England began to realise her true interest. Invoking the theme of his *Charles V*, Robertson emphasised that fear of universal monarchy and the promise of thwarting Spain at sea introduced the notion of founding colonies.¹⁷¹

For Robertson the impetus to settle New England was religion alone. This led Robertson into an uncharacteristically detailed discussion of the political repercussions of seventeenth-century Protestant sectarianism. He introduced a typology of reformation based squarely on divergent views of church government; the minister naturally never conceded that there might have been any substantive theological distinctions between them. He spoke of two types of reformation, one in opposition to the state and the other carried out with its active connivance. Calvinism was the model form of the first, where the model of ecclesiastical governance was chosen in no small part for its very 'repugnancy to those of the Popish church.' The Church of England was representative of the second, and did not involve such a radical rupture with past Roman practice. Unfortunately for civil peace, both models of reformation occurred simultaneously in

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 31-32.

England, and their irreconcilability directly led to settlement in the New World. The historian of Scotland retained some of his antipathy to Elizabeth. In a disdainful footnote he remarked upon the Queen's insistence on her own superior skill in theology, as well as the haughty tone in which she dictated to others what they ought to believe.¹⁷² Yet, as ever, Robertson felt the need to qualify his judgment as it applied to her, and the subject of persecution generally. An age in which religion had become the principal reason of state was not one that was practically or psychologically disposed toward modern notions of toleration.

To the disgrace of Christians, the sacred rights of conscience and private judgment, as well as the charity and mutual forbearance suitable to the mild spirit of the religion which they professed, were in that age little understood. Not only the idea of toleration, but even the word itself in the sense now affixed to it, was then unknown. Every church claimed a right to employ the hand of power for the protection of truth and the extirpation of error.¹⁷³

'But persecution, as usually happens, instead of extinguishing, inflamed their zeal to such a height, that the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts of law was deemed insufficient to suppress it, and a new tribunal was established under the title of the *high commission for ecclesiastical affairs*, whose powers and mode of procedure were hardly less odious or less hostile to the principles of justice than those of the Spanish inquisition.'¹⁷⁴ Yet it is clear that Robertson held little more sympathy for motivations of the puritan settlers than he had for the Spanish, dubbing their motivation as 'the levelling genius of fanaticism.'

The 'wild notions' of the Puritans caused them to reject 'various judicatories, descending from one another in regular subordination'.¹⁷⁵ They in fact landed in Cape Cod, a region entirely outwith the jurisdiction of the Virginia company. Robertson

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 172.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 175-6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 178.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 179.

levelled a discernibly Humean critique of the utopian polity the puritans established. Puritan notions of civil polity were founded on the 'wild notion' that scripture contained within it a workable system of secular politics. The settlers, relying on a literal reading of the Acts of the Apostles, had emulated their practice of holding property in common. While Robertson extolled the benefits of this practice among unimproved people, for English citizens this agrarian law was 'too refined to be capable of being accommodated to the affairs of men.'¹⁷⁶ The settlers were portrayed as being even more intolerant and exclusionary than the court of Elizabeth itself. Only accepted members of the religious community enjoyed any rights of citizenship. The degree of social control exercised by the clergy could only be described as priestcraft at its most pernicious. Ministers 'exercised a discretionary judgment' so 'all men paid court' to them, hypocritically 'assuming those austere and sanctimonious manners which were known to be the most certain recommendation to their favour.'¹⁷⁷

Two contradictory forces rendered the history of the settler community in New England paradoxical; the natural tendency of constitutions to become more regular with the passing of time, and the fact that the constitution of Virginia was built on and encouraged the fanaticism at its root. 'The colony must henceforth be considered,' Robertson insisted, 'not as a corporation whose powers were defined, and its mode of procedure regulated by its charter, but as a society, which, having acquired or assumed political liberty, had, by its own voluntary deed, adopted a constitution or government framed on the model of that of England.'¹⁷⁸ In escaping the clutch of exclusive companies, British settlement in New England thus crucially avoided one of the principal

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 189.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 210.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 213-214.

defects that had brought about the corruption of both Portuguese and Spanish settlements. Only now was there any possibility of escaping the spirit of monopoly that served as such a stranglehold over previous operations. Yet, Robertson regretfully pointed out that twenty years of hardship had done little to recommend the folly of those very monopoly rights to European based corporations. It is noticeable and worthy of comment that Robertson displayed a striking lack of concern for the fact that English settlements trampled upon the property rights of other Europeans. 'The Dutch, recently settled in America, and too feeble to engage in a war, peaceably withdrew from Connecticut.'¹⁷⁹

The war between the New England settlers and the Pequods repeated the trope of the wars between the Spanish and the natives of south. War between peoples had a disturbing tendency to confound stereotypes, and often served to corrupt the better aspects of both sides. It had not always been so among the English settlers. Robertson, following his sources, was at pains to point out the relatively lawful behaviour of the settlers regarding the indigenous population and their property rights. 'The tribes of Indians around Massachusetts Bay were feeble and unwarlike; yet from regard to justice, as well as motives of prudence,' Robertson maintained, 'the first colonists were studious to obtain the consent of the natives before they ventured to occupy any of their lands; and though in such transactions the consideration given was often very inadequate to the value of the territory acquired, it was sufficient to satisfy the demands of the proprietors.'¹⁸⁰

The Pequods were a formidable people, who could bring into the field a thousand warriors, not inferior in courage to any in the New World. They foresaw, not only that the extermination of the Indian race must be the consequence of permitting the English to spread over the continent of America, but that if measures were not

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 224.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 228-229.

speedily concerted to prevent it, the calamity would be unavoidable.¹⁸¹

The Pequods made war in the usual manner of the savage, 'they surprised stragglers, and scalped them; they plundered and burnt remote settlements.'¹⁸² The colonies then combined to make war upon this tribe, with tragic results. 'In less than three months the tribe of Pequods was extirpated: a few miserable fugitives who took refuge among the neighbouring Indians, being incorporated by them, lost their name as a distinct people.' The proximate cause of this minor genocide was the failure of the English to recognise that the Indians had rights as free people. Instead, the English went the way of the Spanish, and in emulating the savage state, far outdid the savagery of those they sought to emulate. 'Instead of treating the Pequods as an independent people, who made a gallant effort to defend the property, the rights, and the freedom of their nation, they retaliated upon them all the barbarities of American war. Some they massacred in cold blood, others they gave up to be tortured by their Indian allies, a considerable number they sold as slaves in Bermudas, the rest were reduced to servitude among themselves.'¹⁸³

Robertson's narrative terminated with events of the mid seventeenth century. Upon his conquest of Jamaica – an issue upon which Robertson did not otherwise comment – Cromwell entertained the project of transporting the population of New England there to serve as a vanguard settlement in a contested region. That the settlers had the presence of mind and the prudence to reject Cromwell's overture gave grounds for some hope for the future.

While one cannot be at all certain whether additional unwritten sections on British America would have substantially altered the character of Robertson's narrative, certain

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 229.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 231.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 234-235.

tentative conclusions can be made. He would surely have argued that settlements made for reasons that might make an enlightened commentator blush would be gradually refined as industry and civility progressed. The constitution of British America would develop and improve in tandem with the soil. The corruption of manners of the settlers as well as their spirit of independence would eventually be mitigated by the increasingly enlightened policy of the metropole. The rule of law would better regulate relations between the English colonists and the Indians, thus paving the way for a more mutually advantageous commerce to exist between them. The prudent policies of an enlightened Spain and an enlightened Britain would naturally come to resemble each other far more closely than the sharp clichéd dichotomy between the empire 'protestant, maritime, commercial, and free' and that of the *leyenda negra* of vulgar and sectarian opinion would lead one to believe. It was possible to envision a future in which the wars of religion and jealousy of trade would no longer be played out across the globe.

Unfortunately, events intruded, and one of the more irksome was to be beaten to the publisher on a second occasion, but this time rather closer to home. Adam Smith had not originally intended to include anything so topical as the present colonial policy, but the wrangling among London politicians convinced him of the utility of entering in. Not all thought the decision wise; Hugh Blair commented that dedicating so much space to a temporarily topical issue would likely date the book rather quickly, and likely prove the good doctor wrong in the process. Blair would have also have known all too well that Smith's text threw something of a spanner in the works of Robertson's own imperial project. *The Wealth of Nations* was altogether too brilliant and too relevant to possibly

ignore, yet the work raised a number of awkward questions concerning the sustainability of commercial empire of the sort to which Robertson gave his qualified endorsement.

Smith devoted considerable space to a discussion of colonies, emphasising both their economic and strategic importance, or rather, their conspicuous lack thereof. In keeping with the mainstream of enlightened critique, Smith held all European colonial policy entirely informed by the spirit of the mercantile system and jealousy of trade. Colonies were, at root, a means by which the metropole could secure a favourable balance of trade *vis à vis* other metropolises. The acts of navigation, by restricting colonial exports, and providing materials, such as pig iron useful for armaments, had fulfilled their controlling and belligerent intent.

Smith found the original impetus to form colonies in modern Europe somewhat obscure. It was not merely a land grab on behalf of the less well off, as had been the case of ancient Rome. The explanation Smith provided bore some similarity to Robertson's; the historian may well have altered his Book I to accommodate it, although, as has been mentioned, the form of much of that book owed a great deal to the example of Montesquieu. For an explanation Smith singled out the example of Venice. Venetian success aroused the jealousy of the Portuguese, and provided the strategic impetus behind the backing of Vasco de Gamma. Smith was less interested than Robertson had been in how the Portuguese constitution enabled Portuguese discovery.

What Columbus found could not have been more disappointing; instead of the rich markets of the east, he stumbled upon 'a country quite covered with wood, uncultivated, and inhabited only by some tribes of naked and miserable savages.'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (Indianapolis, 1981) vol. II, p. 559.

Columbus was unimpressed by the natural productions of the land he found, with a single exception: gold. The conversion of souls was merely a pretext for the refinement of minerals. All subsequent Spanish colonisation proceeded from this motive. It was a disastrous choice. 'It is perhaps the most disadvantageous lottery in the world, or the one in which the gain of those who draw the prizes bears the least proportion to the loss of those who draw blanks.'¹⁸⁵ Mines, in short, offered no stable return for investment. Smith went so far as to claim that, at the present moment, there existed no mines in Spanish America worth anyone's bother. This was the wisdom of posterity, Smith recognised. Other European powers chose the path of Spain, and sailed west in search of an El Dorado to call their own.

For Smith, the American colonies enjoyed the tremendous advantage of a population that had inherited subordination and agriculture, without the disadvantage of the legal detritus of the feudal past, such as unnaturally high rents and entails. The American colonies additionally enjoyed free trade within the internal market of the Empire. The overall effect of present policy was the effective encouragement of agriculture, which was more or less in accordance with enlightened principle. The colonial relationship promoted high growth rates in both colony and metropole.

However, Smith was equally clear that it would not be possible indefinitely to prolong rapid growth under the present restrictions. Nor was it clear that such a fundamental redirection of trade to a distant market was the best deployment of British capital. In many ways, France was ironically Britain's ideal market. It was a particularly unfortunate irony as colonial competition had led to several costly wars concerning which Smith was acridly cynical. The cruel fact was that British imperial

¹⁸⁵ *Wealth of Nations*, vol. II, p. 562.

policy was not written with the interest of the nation as a whole in mind, it wholly served the merchant interest. The cost of the Spanish and French war was 'in reality, a bounty which has been given in order to support a monopoly.' Bloody and destructive wars continued to be fought for a commercial interest improperly understood.

Smith argued that only two options existed regarding her colonies, effective taxation or withdrawal. The Seven Years War had been fought on behalf of the entire empire, and thus it was not contrary to justice for colonists to make a contribution to the repayment of the British national debt. The best solution would be to incorporate colonies within the existing domestic tax scheme and to establish the entire empire as a free trade zone. The most striking aspect of Smith's proposals for union was the offer of colonial representation at Westminster. Smith argued that if raising additional revenue were to prove impossible, no option remained but to reduce expense, and the British state had no greater expense than the defence of far-flung colonies. 'If any of the provinces of the British empire cannot be made to contribute towards the support of the whole empire, it is surely time that Great Britain should free herself from the expense of defending those provinces in time of war, and of supporting any part of their civil or military establishment in time of peace, and endeavour to accommodate her future views and designs to the real mediocrity of her circumstances.' In a distinctly Humean passage, Smith goaded his readers:

The rulers of Great Britain have, for more than a century past, amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic. This empire, however, has hitherto existed in the imagination only. It has hitherto been, not an empire, but the project of an empire. . . . If the project cannot be completed, it ought to be given up.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 256.

Smith's recommendations have traditionally been described as utopian and only semi-serious, but can be seen in as forming part of a tradition of Scottish recommendations for empire to be rethought in terms of confederated union.¹⁸⁷ Of course, Smith would or should have known that at the time of publishing neither London nor Philadelphia was prepared to consider a British empire in terms of confederation, the former had no tradition of doing so, the latter had only just given up doing so.¹⁸⁸

Robertson incorporated these Smithian insights into his final valedictory book on Spanish policy as best he could. Perhaps sensitive to earlier criticism that Smith resented the historian's unaccredited borrowings from his lectures in the *View*, Robertson not only copiously cited *Wealth of Nations* in the text of Book VIII, but also wrote to Smith forewarning he was to do so. Ironically given the uncomfortably close relation with Smith's text, an early review declared this book to be 'perhaps the most interesting to readers' of the entire work. A recent synoptic overview of writing on Spanish policy of the early modern period also considered it to be the only genuinely original section of Robertson's text.¹⁸⁹ Robertson had always intended his critique of Spanish policy as the interpretive heart of his work, even if he had not foreseen that critique as a dialogue with Adam Smith. In the course of Robertson's researches, he had come to be increasingly impressed by the intellectual quality and the lack of patriotic sentimentality in the inquiry of the Spanish literati into the causes of the decline of Spanish empire and the possibility of civic and commercial renewal. This new generation of intellectuals lamented what they perceived as the anachronistically militarised nature of Spanish society, a pathology

¹⁸⁷ Ned Landsman, 'The legacy of British Union,' pp. 301-311.

¹⁸⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, 'Empire, State and Confederation: The War of American Independence as a Crisis in Multiple Monarchy' in Robertson (ed), *A Union for Empire*, pp. 341-345.

¹⁸⁹ D. A. Brading, *The First America: the Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 440.

they attributed to the legacy of conquest. While recent scholarship has tended to emphasise the economically tentative and neo-Colbertian nature of this reform movement, essentially interested in increasing the efficiency of silver extraction and only to a secondary degree interested in liberalising trade, what was most impressive to Robertson was that these reforms enjoyed the enthusiastic endorsement of King Charles III.¹⁹⁰ The most eminent of these was the antiquarian and political economist, Don Pedro Rodriguez Campomanes, sometime minister of state and director of the Royal Historical Society of Madrid. In his *Discurso sobre el Fomento de la Industria Popular* (1774), probably his best known work, Campomanes called for a thorough reform of Spain's agrarian economy. Yet in his earlier *Reflexiones sobre el Comercio Espanol a Indias*, Campomanes had argued that, alone of the European empires, Spain had improved the indigenous peoples to the point where they became economically productive. He was a Spanish 'ancient constitutionalist', who argued that since the strategically disadvantageous link with the eastern branch of the Habsburgs had ended, Spain could now begin the difficult path of reform and renewal. Campomanes believed that the best path to achieve this end was the emulation of British practice, namely by granting legislative autonomy to New Spain for the purpose of rendering it economically competitive. Drawing from Hume, Campomanes understood that the very weakness of the Spanish economy could prove the basis to effectively undercut the exports of richer countries.¹⁹¹ Additionally, in the Spaniard's wish to reconceive Spain and her empire as

¹⁹⁰ A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, p. 67.

¹⁹¹ C. Jago 'The 18th Century Economic Analysis of the Decline of Spain' in P. Fritz and D. Williams (eds.), *The Triumph of Culture: 18th Century Perspectives*, (Toronto, 1972), p. 346. For the background to Hume's thinking on the potential competitiveness of poor economies see I. Hont 'The Rich Country, Poor Country Debate' in I. Hont and M. Ignatiev (eds.) *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 271-315.

an imperial union, Campomanes' reform programme demonstrated that the cutting edge of Spanish and Scottish imperial thinking was proceeding in tandem.¹⁹² Campomanes proved a helpful research assistant for Robertson, and the two developed a friendly correspondence. Robertson's Book VIII owed its greatest debt to these authors of the Spanish Enlightenment.

The notion of Robertson as cribbing from Smith in his analysis of colonial policy was also unfair in that Book VIII only addressed more systematically themes Robertson had pursued all along. Robertson had first addressed the issue of Spanish culpability for the shocking decline of population among the indigenous inhabitants in his narration of the aftermath of conquest. While over the course of the narrative Robertson seemed to sympathise with those governors who found their administrations thwarted by ministers in Madrid, now he squarely placed blame on the policy of those same over-powerful viceroys and governors. Robertson rejected the notion that either the Spanish crown or the Spanish church had any role to play in this demographic disaster. Specifically, Robertson did not hold the Spanish crown responsible for the excesses involved in extracting labour from the native population. The Spanish crown had enacted prudent legislation towards the protection of the Indians; it was hardly its fault if those laws were badly enforced or largely ignored by those less admirable.¹⁹³ This was a reasonably

¹⁹² *America*, vol. III, pp. 121-123.

¹⁹³ 'In those regulations of the Spanish monarchs, we discover no traces of that cruel system of extermination, which they have been charged with adopting; and if we admit, that the necessity of securing subsistence for their colonies, or the advantages derived from working the mines, give them a right to avail themselves of the labour of the Indians, we must allow, that the attention with which they regulate and recompense that labour, is provident and sagacious. In no code of laws is greater solicitude displayed, or precautions multiplied with more prudent concern for the preservation, the security, and the happiness of the subject, than we discover in the collection of the Spanish laws for the Indies. But those later regulations, like the more early edicts which have been already mentioned, have too often proved ineffectual remedies against the evils which they were intended to prevent. In every age, if the same causes continue to operate, the same effects must follow. From the immense distance

forthright rejection of the core of the black legend of Spanish history, that genocide and Inquisition alike were the wicked design of popish bigots. However, in buttressing the good intentions of the Spanish crown against the more inflammatory accusations of protestant rhetoric, Robertson placed himself, for good or ill, in a historiographically antagonistic relationship to a Creole scholarship that took a more dim view of Spanish policy. For the historian, incidental abuses of the Indians, however grievous, were fundamentally the actions of simply a few too many bad apples. Robertson was keen to point out that such abuses were far from universal. Robertson went further still, emphasising that such Creole complaints were not borne out by their own testimony. 'According to the accounts, even of those authors who are most disposed to exaggerate the sufferings of the Indians,' Robertson wrote, 'they, in several provinces, enjoy not only ease, but affluence; they possess large farms; they are masters of numerous herds and flocks; and, by the knowledge which they have acquired of European arts and industry, are supplied not only with the necessities, but with many luxuries of life.'¹⁹⁴ Creole complaints, in essence, were fundamentally ungrateful. Clavijero, the Creole historian, would come to the conclusion as a result of this that the Scottish historian was rather indecently eager to forgive and forget. From a Creole perspective, Clavijero's was an entirely intelligible response. Robertson did come close to hinting at doubts that their historiography had much merit as impartial history. No doubt Robertson would have

between the power entrusted with the execution of laws, and that by whose authority they are enacted, the vigour even of the most absolute government must relax, and the dread of a superior, too remote to observe with accuracy, or to punish with dispatch, must insensibly abate. Notwithstanding the numerous injunctions of the Spanish monarchs, the Indians still suffer on many occasions, both from the avarice of individuals, and from the exactions of the magistrates, who ought to have protected them; unreasonable tasks are imposed; the term of their labour is prolonged beyond the period fixed by law, and they groan under many of the insults and wrongs which are the lot of a dependent people.' *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 288.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 289.

considered his own more metropolitan sympathies more philosophical; it was only the mark of prudent governance to treat a people in accordance with their level of development.

This was not to say that Robertson found nothing to criticise in policy directed from Madrid. Indeed, the present state of the Creole character was at root the fault of Spanish policy. The crown would never have suffered colonial administrators to pursue the policies they did had it not understood those policies to accord with its own interest. The root was a misunderstanding of the true principles of commerce. The Spanish crown had foolishly accorded too great a strategic importance to the acquisition of gold. The effect of monopoly was to reinforce the Creole system of land tenure that kept the Spanish colonies in a state of dependence and pupillage. The creation of great estates, the *encomienda system*, had the effect of revivifying and consolidating the most pernicious aspects of the feudal system at precisely the time such regulations were being relaxed and reformed throughout Western Europe.¹⁹⁵ The effect of this was that present day Creoles suffered from the sort of lethargy that Europe suffered while under the feudal yoke.

Though some of the Creolian race are descended from the conquerors of the New World; though others can trace up their pedigree to the noblest families in Spain; though many are possessed of ample fortunes, yet, by the enervating influence of a sultry climate, by the rigour of a jealous government, and by their despair of attaining that distinction to which mankind naturally aspire, the vigour of their minds is so entirely broken, that a great part of them waste life in luxurious indulgencies, mingled

¹⁹⁵ 'The mode in which property was distributed in the Spanish colonies, and the regulations established with respect to the transmission of it, whether by descent or by sale, were extremely unfavourable to population. In order to promote a rapid increase of people in any new settlement, property in land ought to be divided into small shares, and the alienation of it should be rendered extremely easy. [Dr. Smith's Inquiry, ii.116] But the rapaciousness of the Spanish conquerors of the new World paid no regard to this fundamental maxim of policy; and, as they possessed power, which enabled them to gratify the utmost extravagance of their wishes, many seized districts of great extent, and held them as *encomiendas*. By degrees they obtained the privilege of converting a part of these into *Mayorazgos*, a species of fief, introduced into the Spanish system of feudal jurisprudence, which can neither be divided or alienated. Thus a great portion of landed property, under this rigid form of entail, is withheld from circulation, and descends from father to son unimproved, and of little value to the proprietor or to the community.' *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 274.

with an illiberal superstition still more baffling. Languid and unenterprising, the operations of an active extended commerce would be to them so cumbersome and oppressive, that in almost every part of America they decline engaging in it. The interior traffic of every colony, as well as any trade which is permitted with the neighbouring provinces, and with Spain itself, are carried on by the Chapetones, who, as the recompense of their industry, amass immense wealth, while the Creoles, sunk in sloth, are satisfied with the revenues of their paternal estates.¹⁹⁶

Robertson took this bit of vitriol relatively straight from Antonio de Ulloa, whose strictures on the savage the historian had also adopted without substantial alteration. European cosmopolitanism came into its own most fully in its acceptance of the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my enemy too.

Having redeemed the Spanish crown, Robertson proceeded to redeem the Spanish church. The most salient and surprising feature of the Spanish church in the Americas was that it developed upon thoroughly erastian principles that any Moderate could celebrate. The American church may well have appeared full of Romish pomp, but it was certainly no vessel for Roman policy. This was not to suggest that the imposition of popery on a new continent was free of pernicious effect. It was difficult to think of a set of manners less conducive to the propagation of native industry than the monastic way of life.

The early institution of monasteries in the Spanish colonies, and the inconsiderate zeal in multiplying them, have been attended with consequences more fatal. In every new settlement, the first object should be to encourage population, and to incite every citizen to contribute towards augmenting the number and strength of the community. During the youth and vigour of society, while there is room to spread, and sustenance is procured with facility, mankind increase with amazing rapidity. But the Spaniards had hardly taken possession of America, when, with a most preposterous policy, they began to erect convents, where persons of both sexes were shut up, under a vow to defeat the purpose of nature, and to counteract the first of her laws. Influenced by a misguided piety, which ascribes transcendent merit to a state of celibacy, or allured by the prospect of that listless ease, which, in sultry climates, is deemed supreme felicity, numbers crowded into those mansions of sloth and superstition, and are lost to society.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 278.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 292.

Ironically, American monasteries had produced the most literate members of the clergy. Robertson further worried that the American clergy, though provided with every opportunity, had not yet cultivated literature or science. It would seem the sort of clerical Enlightenment Robertson understood was some time off. The retrograde development of the American clergy had an unfortunate effect upon missionary activity. Monastic missionaries, trained in scholastic sophistries rather than the languages of the natives, rationalised that only the scantest interest in conversion constituted a genuine conversion of the soul. As a result the Indians never properly understood the tenets of revelation, mixing it with their prior understandings, and given, the slightest opportunity, would relapse into idolatry. Yet, as Robertson's previous digressions concerning the nature of the savage mind would indicate, even if Spanish missionaries had gone about their task with due prudence, they would have been unlikely to enjoy success. The minds of hunters were unprepared to entertain abstract notions, and thus 'the sublime and spiritual doctrines of Christianity must be, in a great measure, incomprehensible.'¹⁹⁸

While Robertson was eager to pardon both crown and church for war crimes committed in the New World, the bulk of his review of Spanish imperial policy and institutions was taken up with a discussion of the misguided and crippling commercial policy that the Spanish crown bequeathed to Europe. The beginnings of Spanish empire were coterminous with jealousy of trade.

The first object of the Spanish monarchs was to secure the productions of the colonies to the parent state, by an absolute prohibition of any intercourse with foreign nations. . . . This spirit of jealousy and exclusion, which at first was natural, and perhaps necessary, augmented as their possessions in America extended, and the value of them came to be more fully understood. In consequence of it, a system of colonizing was introduced, to which there had hitherto been nothing similar among mankind.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 301.

Robertson's history of colonial policy, and his attempt to show the uniqueness of the early modern achievement, owed a debt to Smith's discussion in Book IV of his *Wealth of Nations*. Smith had contrasted modern from ancient colonies on the grounds that the latter were pursued out of necessity, whereas the former had more opaque motivations.¹⁹⁹ In Robertson's discussion, colonies in the ancient world followed either the Greek model, the products of migrations that soon became independent, or the Roman model of military garrisons. The Spanish model seemed to combine both. That Spain's new colonies lay in the tropics, and produced goods distinct from that of the home market, was central to their success. The American economy was entirely geared to the needs of the metropole; production of goods Spain herself could provide was expressly forbidden. During the first century of colonisation, this did not prove a problem, as Spain could easily provide the needs of the fledgling American market. As the Spanish economy collapsed at the end of the sixteenth century, it became increasingly self-defeating that her colonies were disallowed trade with the other states of Europe or even with each other. New Spain was perfectly capable of providing the material goods necessary to keep the Spanish economy afloat and her people prosperous, but was not allowed to compete with domestic production. Spanish colonies never achieved the economic growth of which they were capable. 'Thus the colonies are kept in a state of perpetual pupillage,' Robertson lamented, 'and by the introduction of this commercial dependence, a refinement in policy of which Spain set the first example to the European nations, the supremacy of the parent state hath been maintained over remote colonies during two centuries and a half.'²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Karen O' Brien *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 154.

²⁰⁰ *America*, vol. III, p. 273.

Robertson held to the view that liberty could only be maintained in an empire of limited extent, which was a key reason why he was such a warm supporter of the 1763 peace. The dialectic of lust for gold abroad and jealousy of trade at home had transformed what should have been an empire for preservation into an empire of expansion.²⁰¹

As Robertson's narrative had shown, the classic problem of imperial overstretch was not brought about by lust for territory, but by lust for gold. This lust for gold was a key foundation for the set of attitudes Hume had described as 'Jealousy of trade', namely that the metal itself was the foundation of wealth. Gold became the idol of new form of superstition. 'The charms of this pursuit, like the rage for deep play, are so bewitching, and take such full possession of the mind, as even to give a new bent to the natural temper. Under its influence, the cautious become enterprising, and the covetous profuse.'²⁰² Echoing the classic moral parallel between the state and the individual, Robertson remarked:

The same thing happens to nations as to individuals. Wealth, which flows in gradually, and with moderate increase, feeds and nourishes that activity which is friendly to commerce, and calls it forth into vigorous and well-conducted exertions; but when opulence pours in suddenly, and with too full a stream, it overturns all sober plans of industry, and brings along with it a taste for what is wild and extravagant, and daring in business or in action. Such was the great and sudden augmentation of power and revenue, that the possession of America brought into Spain, and some symptoms of its pernicious influence upon the political

²⁰¹ 'If the dominions of Spain in the New World had been of such moderate extent, as bore a due proportion to the parent state, the progress of her colonizing might have been attended with the same benefit as that of other nations. But when, in less than half a century, her inconsiderate rapacity had seized on countries larger than all Europe, her inability to fill such vast regions with a number of inhabitants sufficient for the cultivation of them, was so obvious, as to give a wrong direction to all the efforts of the colonists. They did not form compact settlements, where industry, circumscribed within proper limits, both in its views and operations, is conducted with that sober persevering spirit, which gradually converts whatever is in its possession to a proper use, and derives thence the greatest advantage. Instead of this, the Spaniards, seduced by the boundless prospect which opened to them, divided their possessions in America into governments of great extent. As their number was too small to attempt the regular culture of the immense provinces, which they occupied rather than peopled, they bent their attention to a few objects, that allured them with hopes of sudden and exorbitant gain, and turned away with contempt from the humbler paths of industry, which lead more slowly, but with greater certainty, to wealth and increase of national strength.' *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 303.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 307.

operations of that monarchy soon began to appear.²⁰³

The arrogance and belligerence that characterised the foreign policy of Philip II could thus be seen as the logical extension of commercial policy. Over-rapid economic growth thus went to the head of the Spanish body politic. However, if the influx of species into Spain had an adverse effect on her political development, Spanish economic policy had an even more startling effect on the population of the Americas. The relationship had become mutually disadvantageous. The dreary irony was that while a growing sociability among the states of Europe produced a balanced state system that gave needed stability to commerce, that very progressive development led to the establishment of colonies established upon principles that rendered those settlements isolated, backward, and corrupt. Jealousy of trade had brought about the alarming development that, in colonial terms, commerce was the primary impediment to improvement. Robertson was not peddling black legend; the logic of his argument extended North as it did South of the Gulf of Mexico. The English, the French, the Danes, have imitated their example with respect to East Indian commerce; and the two former have laid a similar restraint upon some branches of their trade with the New World. The wit of man cannot, perhaps, devise a method for checking the progress of industry and population in a new colony more effectual than this.²⁰⁴

Robertson's hopeful wish was that throughout Europe philosophy had begun to correct errors in commercial understanding first brought about through jealous reason of state. In Robertson's view, Spain was no longer an intellectual backwater. The ground

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 314.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 320.

for an enlightened commercial policy had been prepared by enlightened monarchy, such as the Bourbons, all of whom for Robertson had been 'beneficent princes'.

The spirit of philosophical inquiry, which it is the glory of the present age to have turned from frivolous or abstruse speculations, to the business and affairs of men, has extended its influence beyond the Pyrenees. In researches of ingenious authors, concerning the police or commerce of nations, the errors and defects of the Spanish system with respect to both met every eye, and have not only been exposed with severity, but are held up as a warning to other states.²⁰⁵

Robertson had in mind not only his helpful correspondent Campomanes, but also such authors as Antonio de Ulloa, whose testimony on the nature of the savage and of Spanish policy he leaned on so heavily. By the time of the text's composition, Charles III had been well under way in launching a series of root and branch reforms of colonial practice, the bulk of which enlightened Europe was keen to approve. Particularly, Charles had a decade earlier opened up Spanish possessions in the West Indies to trade with Spain herself. Robertson was particularly happy to emphasise that a new generation of Spanish magistrates had addressed themselves to 'revive a spirit of industry among their subjects' so as at long last to satisfy American demand, rendering the colonial relationship tenable.²⁰⁶

While Robertson was eager to present Spanish policy as encouragingly moving towards an enlightened policy, he was under no misapprehension concerning the difficulty of the task at hand. Even the most enlightened of legislator could face no challenge more daunting than the renovation of a corrupt system. Thus, we return to Robertson's harshly realistic assessment of the present state of the Spanish empire.

A spirit of corruption has infected all the colonies of Spain in America.
Men far removed from the seat of government; impatient to acquire wealth,

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* vol. III, p. 337.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* vol. III, p. 348.

that they may return speedily home from what they are apt to consider as a state of exile in a remote unhealthful country; allured by opportunities too tempting to be resisted, and seduced by the example of those around them; find their sentiments of honour and of duty gradually relax. In private life, they give themselves up to a dissolute luxury, while in their public conduct they become unmindful of what they owe to their sovereign and to their country.²⁰⁷

It is difficult to avoid the impression that Robertson was making a more general point about the duties of colonial patriotism. If it was a sentiment scarcely likely to win the approbation of a Creole readership, it was altogether more likely to win the ascent of an enlightened, patriotic Spaniard. It was not the most triumphal of valedictories, but it was enough to receive on 8 August 1777 the honorarium of Historiographer Royal of Madrid, in gratitude from the Spanish intelligentsia for his dissemination of the knowledge of Spanish history. The title was awarded following the public reading of a few chapters translated into Spanish by Don Ramón de Guevara Vasconcelos. If Robertson was ultimately unable to bring about the reconciliation of states, he made no small contribution to the reconciliation of scholarly communities. As a moving testament to this, Campomanes was soon to write Robertson a warm and respectful letter thanking him on behalf of all men of moderation for his 'singularly humane and benevolent' conduct on behalf of the Catholics of Scotland.²⁰⁸ The Spanish Academy commissioned for *The History of America* to be translated into Spanish, yet this attempt at rapprochement was to fare no better than Robertson's attempt to ease passage of Catholic relief. In November of the next year, a member of the Academy, José de Gálvez sent Campomanes a critical

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 352

²⁰⁸ 'Your laudable conduct in these critical circumstances will procure you the greatest credit and esteem in the opinion of all men of moderation, probity, and discernment; being highly characteristic of that temperate and mild philosophy which has distinguished wise men in the most enlightened ages. . . The Academy, which knows how to appreciate the valuable qualities of the heart, as well as extraordinary talents and learning, charges me to convey to you these sentiments; and it doubts not, but from a conviction of what importance to the prosperity of a state, must be a religious peace and concord between the subjects of a common sovereign, you will continue to extend your protection to the Catholics of Scotland.' Op. cit. in D. Stuart, 'Life of Robertson', in *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 239.

dissertation on the accuracy of some of Robertson's accusations against the Conquistadors and recommended the Academy reopen debate on the work with the intention to 'vidicar la verdad de la Historia, el honor de la nación, la justicia de la conquista y del gobierno y la reputación de los conquistadores.'²⁰⁹ The Spanish crown, which did not wish the details of colonial policy broadcast too widely among their own citizens, swiftly aborted the translation. It was no small irony that the translation of a work that sought to celebrate the reforms of an improving government, no less than his support for religious toleration, had been thwarted for jealous reasons of state.²¹⁰

The preceding chapter has discussed the centrality of war to Robertson's narrative of the rise of empire. It suggested that the dialectic of war and commerce had profoundly informed imperial discourse throughout the eighteenth century, and that it was a central theme of enlightened thought that this dialectic was based upon a flawed and profoundly dangerous understanding of commerce. Robertson conceived his narrative at the time of the Seven Years War and abandoned it as a result of the civil war resultant from its aftermath. These wars were inspired by jealousy of trade, a fact reflected on nearly every page of Robertson's text. The Spanish had understood wealth as gold, and had sallied forth to the Americas to hoard as much of it as they could. Their lust had become a sort of superstitious veneration, one that drove them to reduce the Indians to slavery so as to obtain it with greater speed, and to understand the Indian as subhuman so as to rationalise their crimes. The result was war between the Spanish and the Indians, and it had been above all in the Indian conduct of war that Robertson's narrative had become unstuck.

²⁰⁹ Op. cit. in G. Anes and A. de Castrillón 'Don Pedro Rodríguez Campomanes, Director de Real Academia de la Historia' in idem, *Campomanes en su II Centario*, p. 373.

²¹⁰ D. Stuart, 'Life of Robertson,' p. 159; R. A. Humphreys 'William Robertson and His *History of America*', pp. 26-27.

The Indian did not conform to the norms of European war, and the explanation of its savagery and its futility against the more improved Spanish could not be rendered intelligible by humanist forms of narration. This drove Robertson to commence a remarkable performance of historical jurisprudence in order to drive home one central fact, the savage fought as he hunted. The conquests of Mexico and Peru only rendered the theme of Spanish corruption in the face of overwhelming temptation the more stark and horrible. It was a profound test of faith to understand all of this as the working of Providence. Yet this was precisely what Robertson wished his reader to understand. The discovery of America had been an inspiring chapter in the history of European achievement and a remarkable proof of the progress of the human mind. Improvement in knowledge and policy had now spread to Spain and held out the prospect for a reformation of Spanish empire. The Providential path had clearly been strewn with obstacles, but that was not in itself grounds for despair.

Conclusion

Robertson's public articulation of his views on the progress of international order was frustratingly tentative and incomplete. This was not because his views were hazy or undeveloped; the historian never felt able to write the comparative history of empires that would have rendered his metanarrative more explicit. Nonetheless, a few tentative suggestions can now be made. Taking *Charles V* and *America* together, it is possible to describe a dynamic of outward spiralling 'state systems' that promised to embrace the entire globe. This process happened twice in human history, the one climaxed in the empire of Rome, and while the other had yet to come, it promised to take shape in the form of global expansion of the European state system in the form of cooperative commercial empires united under free trade. These empires had come into being through brutal conquest, but that brutality had ceased after conquered territories had been assimilated and the benefits of improvement could be enjoyed. Robertson understood this to be as true of Spanish as it had been of Roman Empire. These empires, in the fullness of time, would civilise the scattered peoples of the world to the point of readiness for the Gospel. The first world empire helped prepare the world for Christ's first appearance, the second imperial system held profound possibilities for the speculative theologian. The telling of this process in its entirety would constitute a truly universal history. Robertson realised to his chagrin he would not live long enough to witness the events that would constitute such a history, but he could rest satisfied for having told a key part of it, as well as for mapping out the principles upon which it could eventually be written. And it all began in the fifteenth century with a few lying popes.

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES

MANUSCRIPTS

National Library of Scotland, *Robertson-Macdonald Papers*

British Library, *Eagerton Papers*

PRINTED SOURCES

PERIODICALS

The Monthly Review, Vol. 57 (August) 1777.

The Scots Magazine, 1756-63

BOOKS, PAMPHLETS AND SERMONS

Anonymous, *Cardinal Tenacin's Plan Presented to the French King, for Settling the Pretender's Family Upon the British Throne, and Compleating the Long-concerted SCHEME of UNIVERSAL MONARCHY in the HOUSE of BOURBON*, London, 1745.

The Progress of the French, in their Views of Universal Monarchy, London, 1756.

Arnot, Hugo, *The History of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1998.

Bacon, Francis, *Essays*, London, 1857

Bell, Hugh, *Observations Upon the Character of Alexander the Great, as Given by the Learned and Reverend Dr. Robertson, in his History of America and in His Historical Disquisition*, Edinburgh, 1792.

Blair, Hugh, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind*, Edinburgh, 1750.

Campbell, John, *The Present State of Europe*, London, 1757.

Fénelon (François de Salignac de la Mothe) and William Grant, Lord Prestongrange, *Two Essays on the Balance of Europe*, London, 1720.

Ferguson, Adam, *A Sermon Preached in the Ersh Language to his Majesty's First Highland Regiment of Foot, Commanded by Lord John Murray, At their Cantonment at Camberwell, on the 18th Day of December, 1745*. Edinburgh, 1745.

-*An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Duncan Forbes, Edinburgh, 1966.

Fletcher, Andrew, *Political Works*, ed. John Robertson, Cambridge, 1997.

Guicciardini, Francesco, *The History of Guicciardin, Contending the Warres of Italie and Other Parties, Continued for many years under sundry Kings and Princes, together with the variations and accidents of the same devided into twenty books*, London, 1579.

Guicciardini, Francesco, *The History of Italy, from the year 1490, to 1532*, translated by the Chevalier A. P. Goddard, London, 1755.

Henry Home, (Lord Kames), *Historical Law Tracts*, Edinburgh, 1758.

-*Essays Upon Several Subjects Concerning British Antiquities*, Bristol, 1993.

Hume, David, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Grieg, Oxford, 1932.

- *The History of Great Britain*, ed. Duncan Forbes, London, 1970.

- *A Treatise on Human Nature*, A. L. Shelby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, eds. Oxford, 1978.

-*The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution of 1688*, Indianapolis, 1983.

-*Political Essays*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge, 1994.

Jardine, John, Review of *The Situation of the World*. *Edinburgh Review*, I, 1755, pp. 39-43.

Macpherson, James, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. Howard Gaskill, Edinburgh 1996.

Montaigne, Michelle de, *The Complete Essays*, ed. M. A. Screech, London, 1991.

More, Thomas, *Utopia*, Cambridge, ed. George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams, Cambridge, 2002.

Paterson, William, *The Writings of William Paterson*, 3 vols, New York, 1968.

Pufendorf, Samuel, *An Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms And States*

- of Europe*, translated by Jodocos Crull, London, 1702.
- On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, ed. James Tully, Cambridge, 1991.
- Raynal, Guillaume Thomas, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlement and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, translated by J. Justamond, London, 1776.
- Robertson, William. *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, to which is attached, a brief History of the Society*, Edinburgh, 1755.
- The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, Edinburgh, 1769.
- The Works of William Robertson*, gen. ed., R. B. Sher, 12 vols. London, 1997.
- Rohan, Duc de, *A Treatise of the Interest of the Princes and States of Christendome*, translated by Henry Hunt, London, 1641.
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques, *A Project for Perpetual Peace*, translated by Tad Nugent, London, 1762.
- Saint-Pierre, Abbé de, *A Project for Settling Peace in Europe: First Proposed by Henry IV of France, and approved of by Queen Elizabeth, and most of the then Princes of Europe, and now discussed at large, and made practicable*. London, 1714.
- Smith, Adam, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner and W. B. Todd, Indianapolis, 1981.
- Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael and P. G. Stein, Indianapolis, 1982.
- Stanley, Thomas, *The History of Philosophy: Containing The Lives, Opinions, Actions and Discourses of the Philosophers of Every Sect*. London, 1701.
- Voltaire, *The General History and State of Europe, from the time of Charlemain to Lewis XIV. With a Preliminary View of the Oriental Empires*, Edinburgh, 1758.
- The History of Charles XII*, London, 1976.
- Wallace, Robert, *Ignorance and Superstition a Source of Violence and Cruelty*, Edinburgh, 1746.
- Walpole, Horace, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, C. H. Bennett, and A. G. Hoover, 15, New Haven, 1952.

Werenfels, Samuel, *Three Discourses: One, a Defence of Private Judgment; The Second, Against the Authority of the Magistrate over Conscience; The Third, Some Considerations concerning the Reuniting of Protestants*. London, 1718.

Williamson, Peter, *French and Indian Cruelty*, Bristol, 1997.

SECONDARY WORKS

unpublished doctoral dissertations

Clark, I. D. L., 'Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland 1752-1805,' PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1963.

Du Toit, Alexander Sigismund Marais, 'Patriotism, Presbyterianism, Liberty and Empire: An Alternative View of the Historical Writing of William Robertson,' Ph.D Thesis, University of London, 2000.

Hargraves, Neil K., 'The Language of Character and the Nature of events in the Historical Writings of William Robertson,' Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1999.

Published works: books

Allan, David. *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment*, Edinburgh, 1993.

Armitage, David, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, Cambridge, 2000.

Brading, D. A. *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492-1866*, Cambridge, 1991.

Brown, Stewart J. (ed.) *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, Cambridge, 1997.

Bryson, Gladys, *Man and Society: The Scottish Enquiry of the Eighteenth-Century*, Princeton, 1945.

Bull, Hedley, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, London, 1977.

- Burleigh, J. H. S., *A Church History of Scotland*, Oxford, 1960.
- Bury, J. B., *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Growth and Origins*, New York, 1960.
- Colley, Linda, *Briton: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, London, 1995.
- , *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850*, London, 2002.
- Devine, T. M., *Scotland's Empire 1600-1815*, London, 2003.
- Forbes, Duncan, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, Cambridge, 1975;
- Gilbert, Felix, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, London, 1965.
- Goubert, Pierre, *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen*, New York, 1970.
- Haakonssen, Knud, *The Science of a Legislator*, Cambridge, 1981.
- , *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: from Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1996.
- Hirschman, Albert, *The Passions and the Interests: Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph*, London, 1977.
- Hicks, Philip, *Neo-classical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume*, London, 1996.
- Hont, Istvan, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, MA, forthcoming.
- Hont, Istvan and Michael Ignatieff, eds. *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1981.
- Hunter, Ian *Rival Enlightenments*, Cambridge, 2001.
- Jones, Colin, *The Great Nation*, London, 2003.
- Keohane, Nannerl O, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, Princeton, 1980.
- Kidd, Colin. *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity*, Cambridge, 1993.
- Macinnes, Alan I., *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603-1788*,

- Melksham, 1996
- Medick, Hans, *Naturzustand und naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft: die Ursprünge der bürgerlichen Sozialtheorie als Geschichtsphilosophie und Sozialwissenschaft bei Samuel Pufendorf, John Locke, und Adam Smith* Göttingen, 1973.
- Meek, R. L., *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge, 1976.
- Meinecke, Friedrich, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History*, translated by Douglas Scott with an introduction by Werner Stark, New Brunswick, NJ, 1998.
- Miller, Peter N., *Defining the Common Good: Empire, religion, and philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge, 1994.
- O'Brien, Karen, *Narratives of Enlightenment, Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon*, Cambridge, 1997.
- Pagden, Anthony, *European Encounters with the New World*, New Haven, 1993.
- Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c1500-1800*, New Haven, 1995.
- Pagden, Anthony, ed. *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 1986.
- Perkins, Merle, *The Moral and Political Philosophy of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre*, London, 1957.
- Phillips, Mark Salber, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of historical writing in Britain 1740-1800*, Princeton, 2000.
- Phillipson, Nicholas, and Rosalind Mitchison, eds. *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, Edinburgh, 1970.
- Phillipson, Nicholas and Quentin Skinner, eds. *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge, 1993.
- Phillipson, Nicholas, *Hume*, London, 1989.
- Pocock, J. G. A., *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government*, Cambridge, 1999.
- Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall*, Cambridge, 2003.

- Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman*, Cambridge, 1959.
- Robertson, John, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, Edinburgh, 1985.
- Robertson, John, (ed.) *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707*, Cambridge, 1995.
- Scott, W. R., *Adam Smith as Student and Professor*, Glasgow, 1937.
- Sher, Richard, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*, Edinburgh, 1985.
- Sher, Richard and Jeffrey Smitten (eds.) *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, Edinburgh, 1990.
- Spaforda, David, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, New Haven, 1990.
- Stein, Peter, *Legal Evolution: The Story of an Idea*, Cambridge, 1980.
- Tuck, Richard, *The Rights of War and Peace, Political Thought and the International Order*, Oxford, 1999.
- White, Hayden, *Metahistory*, Baltimore, 1975.
- Wilcox, D. J., *The Measure of Time Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time*, Chicago, 1987.
- Yates, Francis, *Astrea. The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1975.

Published materials: Articles

- Anes, G. and A. de Castrillón 'Don Pedro Rodríguez Campomanes, Director de Real Academia de la Historia' in *Campomanes en su II Centenario*, Madrid, 2003, pp. 359-377.
- Armitage, David, 'Making the Empire British: Scotland in the Atlantic World 1542-1707', *Past and Present*, 155 (May 1997) pp. 34-63.
- Black, Jeremy, 'The Enlightenment Historian at Work: The Researches of William Robertson.' *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 65 (1988), pp. 251-60.

- Brown, Stewart J. 'An Eighteenth-Century Historian on the Amerindians: Culture, Colonialism, and Christianity in William Robertson's *History of America*.' *Studies in World Christianity*, 2 (1996), pp. 204-22.
- de Vet, J. J. V. M. 'Some Periodicals of the United Provinces on Pufendorf: reconnecting the reception of his ideas in the 17th and 18th centuries' in F. Palladini ed. *Samuel Pufendorf und die Europäische Frühaufklärung*, Berlin, 1994. pp. 208-222.
- Dreitzel, Horst, 'Reason of state and the crisis of political aristotelianism: an essay on the development of 17th century political philosophy', *History of European Ideas*, 28 (2002), pp. 163-187.
- Duckworth, Mark, 'An Eighteenth-Century Questionnaire: William Robertson on the Indians,' *Eighteenth-Century Life*, II (1987), pp. 36-49.
- Dufour, Alfred, 'Pufendorf', *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 561-588.
- Du Toit, Alexander, 'Who are the Barbarians? Scottish Views of Conquest and Indians and Robertson's *The History of America*' *Scottish Literary Journal* 26 (1999), pp. 29-47.
- Forbes, Duncan, 'Scientific' Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar, *Cambridge Journal*, 7 (1954), pp 643-670.
- 'Sceptical Whiggism, Commerce, and Liberty' in *Essays on Adam Smith*, Oxford, 1976, pp. 179-201.
- Gilbert, Felix, 'The "New Diplomacy" of the Eighteenth Century' *World Politics*, (Oct., 1951), pp 1-38.
- 'Introduction,' *William Robertson: The Progress of Society in Europe*, Chicago, 1972.
- Goddard, P., 'Augustine and the Amerindian in Seventeenth-Century New France', *Church History*, 67 (1998), pp. 662-681.
- Gunn, J. A. W. "'Interest Will Not Lie:" A Seventeenth-Century Political Maxim, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29 (1968), pp. 551-564.
- Hargraves, Neil, 'Enterprise, adventure and industry: the formation of 'commercial character' in William Robertson's *History of America*', *History of European Ideas*, 29 (2003), pp. 33-54.
- Hill, Jacqueline, 'Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: the Disputed

- Lessons of Irish History 1690-1812' in *Past and Present*, 118 (1988), pp. 96-129.
- Hoebel, E. H., 'William Robertson: An Eighteenth-Century Anthropologist-Historian,' *American Anthropologist*, 62 (1960), pp. 648-655.
- Höpfl, Harro, 'From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment' *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1978), pp. 19-40.
- 'Orthodoxy and Reason of State,' *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 23 (2002), pp. 212-237.
- Horn, D. B., 'The Diplomatic Revolution' in J. O. Lindsay (ed), *The New Cambridge Modern History, Vol. VII: The Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 440-464.
- Humphreys, R. A., 'William Robertson and his *History of America*: A Lecture Delivered at Canning House on 11 June 1954'. London.
- Jago, C., 'The 18th Century Economic Analysis of the Decline of Spain,' in Paul Fritz and David Williams, (eds.) *The Triumph of Culture: 18th Century Perspectives*, Toronto, 1972, pp. 335-351.
- Kaiser, T. E., 'The Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Public Opinion, and the Reconstitution of the French Monarchy,' *The Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), pp. 623-626.
- Krieger, Leonard, 'History and Law in the Seventeenth Century: Pufendorf', 21 (1960), pp. 198-210.
- Landsman, Ned. 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775, in J. Dwyer and R. Sher (eds.) *Sociability and Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1991, pp. 195-209.
- 'Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800,' *The American Historical Review*, 104, (1999), pp 463-475.
- McKelvey, James L., 'William Robertson and Lord Bute,' *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 6 (1968), pp. 238-47.
- O' Brien, Karen. 'Between Enlightenment and Stadial History: William Robertson on the History of Europe.' *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 16 (1993), pp. 53-63.
- Pares, Richard, 'American versus Continental Warfare, 1739-63', *The English Historical Review*, 51 (1936), pp. 429-465.
- Pascal, 'Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth-Century'

- Modern Quarterly*, 2 (1938), pp. 167-179.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Virtue, Rights and Manners: A model for historians of political thought, *Virtue, Commerce, and History, Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 37-50.
- Riley, Patrick. 'Fenelon Philosophe,' *The Philosophical Review*, 90 (1981), pp. 285-289.
- Robertson, John, 'Gibbon's Roman Empire as a Universal Monarchy: the *Decline and Fall* and the Imperial Idea in Early Modern Europe' in R. McKitterick and R. Quinault (eds) *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 247-270.
- Sher, Richard, '1688 and 1788: William Robertson on Revolution in Britain and France.' in P. Dukes and J. Dunkley (eds.) *Culture and Revolution*. London, 1990, pp. 98-109.
- Sher, Richard and Alexander Murdoch, 'Patronage and Party in the Church of Scotland, 1750-1805', in *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408-1929*. Edinburgh, 1983, pp. 197-220.
- Sher, Richard and M. A. Stewart, 'William Robertson and David Hume: Three Letters,' *Hume Studies: 10th Anniversary Issue*, pp. 69-85.
- Smith, Paul B., 'Conjecture, Acquiescence, and John Millar's History of Ireland' *The European Legacy*, 1 (1996), pp. 2227-2248.
- Smitten, Jeffrey, 'Impartiality in Robertson's *History of America*,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19, 1985, pp. 56-77.
- 'The Shaping of Moderation: William Robertson and Arminianism' *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 22, 1992, pp. 281-300.
- Trevor-Roper, H. R., 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,' in *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays*, New York, 1969, pp. 193-239.
- Womack, W. R., 'Eighteenth-century themes in the *Historie philosophique et politique des deux Indes* of Guillaume Raynal', in *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 96 (Oxford, 1972), pp. 129-265.
- Womersley, David, 'The Historical Writings of William Robertson,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986), pp. 497-506.
- 'Introduction', in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Harmondsworth, 1994, vol. I, pp. lii-lv.

Wood, Paul, 'The Natural History of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment' *History of Science*, 27 (1989), pp. 89-123.